

**Rural Parents' Engagement in Education in Bangladesh:
Problems and Possibilities**

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Dedication

To my parents Mahammad Rafiqul Islam and Doly Islam

For their unconditional care, inspiration and raising me here today despite
their own struggles

and

To my wife Farjana Akter and my daughter Arneela Areeba Ayaat

..... my wife for sacrificing her valuable time in her life, being alone, taking
care of my daughter and allowing me to conduct my study

..... my daughter for being part of my life, growing up alone and inspiring me
from a long distance to conduct my study

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Abstract

This thesis explores the engagement practices, understandings and experiences of parents and teachers in the rural context in Bangladesh. It investigates the underlying factors that create blocks to engagement. It examines the complex interplay of expectations, blame-giving, financial constraints and pervasive social problems within the context, and how that interplay both calls for and yet inhibits engagement. The thesis also reports one head teacher's initiatives to overcome the blocks and to create space for engagement.

The study is a qualitative case study that utilises an emergent research design. This process of data collection offered me the flexibility to respond to contextual conditions and to capture rich data through group discussions and individual conversations with the teachers, parents and the community people. It allowed me to observe participants' activities, review related documents and maintain a reflective research journal. The importance of *place* is highlighted throughout as my study sought to identify and report not only actual practices but the cultural, social and economic conditions that shape those practices. Place contextualises where policy decisions are to be implemented. Place is also a significant consideration in identifying the kinds of steps that might be taken to overcome barriers. Therefore, attention is given to describing the rural context of Bangladesh and its people in some detail.

The study begins with examining the reasons for importance being placed on parental engagement by policy, and reports the problems in implementing policy aspirations in the rural context through the lenses of parents and teachers. It found that teachers were frustrated by lack of parental response to invitations and by their apparent disinterest in their children's educational progress. It also found that parental illiteracy and poverty were major factors in preventing parents from becoming engaged with educational matters. Additional factors were unsatisfactory communication processes, the complex nature of the cultural relationship between parents and teachers, and the politicised nature of schools' public programmes. I found of understandings, by both parents and teachers of the concept and possibilities of engagement were largely very limited.

The thesis explores how cultural and socio-economic conditions shape dominant discourses and arbitrate access to cultural capital as well as posing practical problems.

These factors impede parental engagement in education and are powerful indicators of why such engagement is needed.

Next the study reports the activities of one head teacher who is taking a different approach in the same context. It details his different and innovative strategies for reaching out to parents and creating space for them to become involved with their children's learning and with the school. It also identifies a number of key characteristics of his leadership that allow him to make a difference and suggests that these characteristics are ones that should be looked for and fostered in appointment processes, professional development and official support.

Finally the implications for policy and practice of the findings are discussed. Two models are offered: the first of the nature and possibilities of parental engagement in rural contexts of Bangladesh; the second of the processes needed to develop parental engagement in such contexts.

The study is a deliberately contextual one. However, some of the contextual factors may have resonances with other contexts and other countries. Moreover the analysis of how contextual factors impact on parental engagement may also be relevant to other contexts. Therefore while the focus is on parental engagement in rural contexts in Bangladesh, it is envisaged that the study will also have wider relevance.

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Chapter One: Introduction

“Why should I need to visit the school?” It was the first day of my data collection and I was in a rickshaw on my way to a school. The way to the school was one of the dirt roads from the upazila headquarters, and I had chosen the cycle driven rickshaw that was one of the common means of transport in the local area. I learned that my driver’s name was Kudrat and as he pedalled on the narrow road between paddy fields he talked to me about my reasons for visiting his district. He had recognised that I was an outsider to his locality, and he started asking me about my purpose. I was eager to continue the conversation and showed my interest in learning about him, his daily life and his family. Kudrat told me his two children were studying in the school he was driving me towards. He told me he would happily introduce me to a teacher from that school who was his relative. Mindful of my research purpose I asked him about this contact with the school. He told me that because the teacher was a relative, he was very relaxed about his children’s schooling and did not need to visit the school. He told me that the teachers were “enough” to take care of his daughter, and moreover his daughter did not want to see her father at her school. His daughter’s teachers were not complaining to him about her performance, he told me, so why would he need to visit the school? Moreover he had a busy life every day and so could not make time to go there anyway. We talked about his children and school a little longer and he assured me he had confidence in the teachers and he had no need to visit the school for updates about his daughter’s education.

As I listened to Kudrat, I wondered how much of his confidence in the teachers was based on understanding of what happened in schools and how much was based on his need to keep working. I mentally reviewed the interview questions I had prepared for my field work and I wondered how many parents might share Kudrat’s attitudes towards schooling. My rickshaw ride was not only taking me physically to my first school, it was also taking me conceptually into the local rural community and into the heart of my research project.

This thesis reports research that explored the processes of engagement between parents and schools in a rural region in Bangladesh. It addresses the research question: what kinds of parental engagement take place in rural schools in Bangladesh?

My research investigated rural parents’ understandings of the process of engagement with schools and their thinking about their children’s education. It also explored the nature of

various school initiatives for inviting engagement and the factors that impact on parental engagement in the rural context. It focused on five schools within an upazila to the northeast of the capital city, Dhaka. An upazila is a sub-district in Bangladesh and an administrative unit. The research explored the challenges that the schools encounter in inviting parents to engage with them and the barriers to parental engagement. It also examined the on-going social issues within the community that make communication between teachers and parents something that is important to develop and it recorded emergent plans formed by a group of parents and teachers to create better opportunities for engagements. In addition it investigated the innovative practices of a particular head teacher and his school.

The study is grounded in the perceptions and actions of parents and teachers I interviewed. However, it also places the empirical data I collected within the context of Bangladesh educational policy and of the social conditions and needs of communities to which the participants belong. Thus it examines various current Bangladesh discourses about education and parental engagement: the official and institutional rhetoric of policy makers and high level officials who tend to see teachers and parents as the obstacles to implementation of significant and sound national policy decisions; the schools' rationalisations of their efforts to implement policy in the face of apparent parental indifference; parents' explanations of the impediments that prevent their visiting schools or engaging with their children's education at home. It examines the socio-economic and cultural relationships between schools and parents and the conditions of daily rural life that lie behind the common discourses, exploring the flows and blockages of power and the ways these shape the acknowledgement and use of various kinds of social and cultural capital within the community. It concludes with a close study of the practice and vision of a particular head teacher who has circumvented some of the commonly experienced obstacles and created ways to engage parents with his school.

Context and rationale

The research has been prompted by a current need within Bangladesh to develop parental engagement in education throughout the country, and by evidence that rural regions have different conditions from urban ones and are largely disadvantaged in terms of education.

The government of Bangladesh is taking a range of initiatives for improving education. The overall goal is to improve the school system in order to offer quality education to students (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2015). It is undertaking initiatives for the change in secondary education through a number of different development projects, including up-skilling teachers, and developing educational leadership, integrating ICT in education, improving English language teaching, enabling inclusive education and developing student-centred teaching. Across all these projects the role of parents and their engagement in their children's schooling is seen as important. Therefore, policy-makers have committed to increasing parental engagement in educational matters. In 1996 the government created legislation that led to the formation of Parents Teachers Associations (PTA) in every school, and more recently (PTA Regulation, 2014) provided funding for running the PTAs (Secondary Education Quality Access and Enhancement Project [SEQAEP], 2014). To focus its call for school and family engagement in PTA activities at the school level (PTA Regulation, 2014), it used the slogan: *Assisting education; teachers are at school and parents are at home*. The policy emphasised that a vital part of ensuring quality in education involved creating an open and friendly environment in schools and of fostering education awareness in the home.

International research supports the concept that home support for schooling is very important. For example, Driessen, Smit and Slegers (2005) emphasised the need to develop strategies for parental involvement in schooling in order to progressively improve the quality of education. Oyserman, Brickman and Rhodes (2007) reported ways in which parental involvement increased students' academic achievement. However, Harris and Robinson (2016) noted that in many cases parental involvement was not constructed in ways that would support student achievement in fundamental ways. International discussions about parental engagement are further reported in Chapter Three.

Bangladesh is a country with a high population, limited sources of capital, and a disparity between the rural and urban regions. It is dominated by urban interests and rural areas are struggling to implement policy initiatives in a well-planned and effective way. Policies and expectations that seem reasonable and realisable in urban areas may well be very difficult to implement in rural areas. The low socio-economic conditions of most rural regions and the difference between urban and rural regions in culture, states of literacy, and standards of living make it problematic to implement any policy similarly in both rural

and urban contexts. Bangladesh still needs to address the challenge of how to implement, and perhaps adapt, its educational aspirations and policies in the rural areas of the country.

Moreover, it appears that, in education as in other arenas, adherence to policy is often only a paper exercise (Islam, 2017). In my study one head teacher showed me his school register book where he was required to report his management of the PTA, and acknowledged he was maintaining records and writing up agendas and decisions just to follow the government's ruling, without any practice of actual meetings. The government has also acknowledged that they have failed to achieve their target and that PTAs are not yet playing their expected role: that they have not been implemented in some areas and so they are not actively increasing parental engagement (SEQAEP, 2014). Therefore, there is need for research that examines parents' and schools' understandings of parental engagement, their beliefs about its value and importance and their opinions about how it can be achieved. This research is particular important for the development of rural education as it is widely acknowledged that rural schooling is significantly disadvantaged in comparison to urban schooling (Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics [BANBEIS], 2017; Amin, 2017; Alam, 2016; Salahuddin, 2016; Habib, 2011).

Historically, parents, as well as the wider community, have played a vital role in establishing secondary schools. After liberation, when Bangladesh became an independent country, many secondary schools were established through community sponsorship and donations of land. From then some parents have held positions as members of their local School Management Committee (SMC), so taking their part in managing secondary schools. However, policy now calls for schools to engage all parents in their children's education. Accordingly, this study has explored current practices in the rural area, looking particularly at school initiatives, the approaches to parents to involve them in their children's schooling, and the challenges encountered. During the initial stages of the study, I found most of the schools seemed prepared to continue their existing ways of operating, blaming parents for their indifference. Parents seemed willing to accept the statements of their indifference, sometimes excusing it by reference to their busyness or shyness to approach the school. Some blamed the school for poor communication. I wanted to further explore the factors that lay behind this apparent *blame game*.

In any context, while a government can impose rules and regulations on schools, implementation is more complex at ground level. In terms of practice, it is not necessarily

easy to bring numbers of parents into a school and enable them to engage with teachers in discussions of their children's learning. Many parents, especially rural ones, consider they have already played their part by sending their children to the school. In the rural context of Bangladesh, when considering the practicalities of implementing policy decisions about parental engagement, it is important to consider the context and the economic and social issues which create difficulties for rural parents, as well as for schools. My study examines the social and economic issues embedded in the context and critically reflects on how they impact on teachers' and parents' actions.

Besides exploring the complexities of parental engagement in the rural context of Bangladesh, my study offers an example of a proactive way to consider initiatives that need to be taken to facilitate engagement. It is not easy for policymakers to address, from the top, the difficulties experienced in a local context and to implement at operational level an aspirational policy for engaging parents with schools for their children's learning. My study suggests that those working on the ground within a context are best placed to recognise the problems that are encountered in the context and that they also have the greatest potential for finding ways to overcome them. Initiatives need to be developed within the specific local context itself so that they are realistic and so that they match the personalities and capabilities of those who are in a position to take action. Bottom-up initiatives with support from the top could offer ways to address many existing educational problems In Bangladesh.

The gap in existing research

Bangladesh is a developing country, and undoubtedly the drive to improved education is one of the high priorities when developing the national budget. There is a clear relationship between education and poverty alleviation. It is evident that the government of Bangladesh has increased the budgetary allocation for the education sector every year. In this current fiscal year 2017- 2018, the Government of Bangladesh has allocated 12.6 % for the education sector (Habib, 2017). However, the principles written into policy are still in the nature of a verbal and somewhat aspirational exercise, and the concept of stakeholders' engagement and what it could mean in practice within the context of Bangladesh has not been thoroughly explored and is perhaps little understood. As Kabir and Akter (2014) have pointed out, parental involvement in Bangladeshi secondary schools is a relatively a new concept. Limited research has been conducted about

schooling in the rural context in Bangladesh. There is even less that investigates how rural parents engage, or do not engage, with their children's schooling. This is that gap that this study seeks to fill.

Investigative approach

As the site of my study I selected Ratanpur¹, an upazila under the Nandanpur² district, which is situated on the bank of the river Jamuna, one of the biggest rivers in Bangladesh. I chose this area because of my earlier experience of working as a supervising field officer under the Ministry of Education. I had seen vulnerabilities in schooling in the rural context, and seen the teachers struggling with their setting and with apparent parental unawareness. During my work with the teachers, they had talked about the various barriers which they were facing in their daily work. They had emphasised the need to develop parental awareness, and they had expressed their need for parental support and understanding. I found at that time that sometimes teachers seemed to have surrendered to the absence of parental response and had little expectation of getting support. Another reason for selecting this region was that it is a fair representation of the Bangladeshi rural context. Bangladesh is often described as a riverine country and it has a total of 306 small and big rivers throughout the country. Rural people's lives are river oriented and the river shapes them in many ways. My job was a transferable job and I was transferred to three other places. My experience in those areas allowed me to see schools experiencing similar problems with developing parental engagement to those that had been talked about by the schools in the Ratanpur area. My experience thus suggests that Ratanpur is a site that has many features that are common throughout rural Bangladesh.

I have approached this research as a case study within an overall qualitative framework. Case study allows the grounded experiences of schools and parents to be examined within their real life context. The overarching case is that of parental engagement in schooling within the rural region of Ratanpur. Five schools are involved in the case together with their parents and wider communities. I selected these schools based on their spontaneous willingness to work with me and allowing me to talk to them in-depth about their activities and even be part of their community for a few months. They agreed to work with me after listening to my purpose, and they trusted that there would not be any trouble as a result of

¹ A pseudonym for the upazila. The river name is real.

² A pseudonym for district.

allowing me into their schools and sharing what I found out from them. My research design and the ways I have preserved participants' anonymity are described in Chapter Four.

As a researcher, I am an insider, not only because I am a Bangladeshi, but also because I spend three years working as a facilitator with secondary schools with the aim of implementing various components of projects under the Ministry of Education. I worked in the particular rural region of this study, and so came to know some of the participants, especially some of the teachers. I worked with the teachers and schools for three years, and I often stayed in the area. In addition I had the opportunity to become involved in work for various government development activities with vulnerable people, especially sending relief to people during the time of floods. That allowed me to reach out to people and also to understand them. I had continued communication with many people after departing from the region and returned to them for this project after one year. During the three years I had previously worked there, I had a formal and official relationship with the teachers and a closer relationship with some of them outside my formal role. After returning for the purpose of my data collection, I spend time to establish my new position with them as a researcher. I actively devoted time to be with the participants of this study with the intention of building friendly and informal relationships. After a short time, I realised that I had indeed re-positioned myself as a researcher. My realisation came from seeing a different kind of behaviour from the teachers; they were talking with me in ways which they would not have when I was an official. I enjoyed the change. However, the change did not mean that they were no longer respecting me, as they would arrange my accommodation and my other needs for staying there and would invite me to various occasions and would spend time with me in the evenings and in any free time.

In a different way, I am also an outsider to the study. This is partly because I could walk away from the schools and the community and so I do not share immediate ownership of the challenges they face. It is also because I went into the field intending to explore and critically analyse what was happening there and make recommendations based on my research. While the insider stance allows me to understand, from experience, the issues that participants raise, the outsider stance allows me to step away from the issues and look at them with critical, although still empathetic, eyes.

Both insider and outsider positions fuse to some extent because the situation I am researching will impact on my children and their generation, and because I want the best possible education processes for my country, which I love and which claims my patriotism. Therefore, I committed myself to examining not only the practices but also the context of parental engagement in schools in depth and with honesty both in terms of reporting what my participants said and in terms of exploring the contextual factors that shaped their practices. From the time I started my study I hoped it would be useful to my country and its policy makers. I always wanted to not only carry out a sound research project but also to contribute something to my country.

Language

This study has been conducted in a place where Bangla is the main language and so discussions were conducted in Bangla with the all the groups of participants. More specifically rural contexts have local dialects and local styles of expression. Most of the parent participants used their local dialect when they talked to me. I did not need to interrupt their natural way of talking, as I come from a similar rural context, which is only separated from theirs by one big river, and I have a similar dialect. Moreover I grew used to any minor differences in the three years I spent there working. As I explain in Chapter Four I translated all our discussions in to English myself.

Language carries nuances of culture as well as attitudinal and emotional content. Therefore, in reporting participant's comments I have tried to keep the flavour of their speech. I have also used Bangla words and phrases where they suggest shades of meaning that I could not translate readily into English. In those cases I have explained them in the text or in footnotes. I have also sometimes drawn on Bangla proverbs and sayings as they too are expressive of the culture of the context.

Outline of chapters

This chapter has outlined the nature and purpose of my research. It has also indicated the national education and policy context in which the subject of parental engagement is an important concern.

The next chapter is about the place where this study is situated. It briefly describes the country as a whole and explains its education system. It then describes the particular rural

location of this study. It examines rural poverty and the daily lives of rural people. It discusses the socio-cultural setting and beliefs and values of the people. It identifies some of the problems that impact on schooling and that in some cases are blocks to parental engagement as well as being reasons why such engagement needs to be developed. My intention is to provide a platform for the readers to understand the findings of this study and their implications. Some of the issues addressed here will reoccur in later chapters, particularly in Chapter Seven, as they emerge from discussion with participants. Here they are described from my own experience and from accounts in published sources.

Chapter Three reviews the literature that relates to and supports this study. In the first part of this chapter I review research that focuses directly on the subject of parental engagement with education in the context of Bangladesh. Then I review international literature that discusses the importance and nature of parental engagement in wider global contexts, particularly noting discussions of the impact of socio-economic factors, of the impact of culture and context, of barriers and accounts of ways that barriers have been overcome. Some of the international findings resonate with Bangladesh and some appear less directly useful because of significant differences in contexts.

Chapter Four describes the methodological choices I made in carrying out this study, emphasising the nature of the field and emergent choices in design. It explains reasons for a qualitative case study approach. It details my entry into the field, selection of participants and processes of collecting data. It explains my process of working from the ground up and using theory only where it seemed useful to further understand the context in which participants' statements and actions needed to be understood. It addresses my ethical obligations and it suggests means by which the rigour and truthfulness of my findings may be judged.

Chapter Five begins with a short discussion of government policies and expectations about parental engagement. It contrasts these with what is actually happening in practice in the rural area of my study. It then reports teachers' statements about how parents are not attending despite frequent invitations from the schools and how they seem unconcerned about their children's learning. It also reports parents' comments. Many of these seem to endorse the teachers' perceptions. Some comments blame the school for poor communication and for using parent events as platforms for local politicians. The chapter then examines how dominant social discourses influence not only the dialogues but also

the beliefs and consequent actions of a community, and signals the need to further examine the contextual factors that have led to apparent parental indifference. It concludes by relating emergent findings to what is discussed in the literature.

Chapter Six returns to some of the problems articulated in Chapter Five, but now examine the contextual factors that constrain participants' actions and understandings. It reports parents' daily struggles and examines their position as parents of a first generation of rural school-goers. It reports some of the tensions both parents and teachers in trying to meet their family obligations as well as provide access to education. It also examines differences in cultural capital, the roles parents and teachers enact in their relationship with each other, the flows of power, powerlessness and obligation.

Chapter Seven examines the issues in the community context that make communication between parents and school very important despite the difficulties in achieving it. It identifies a range of problems that face young people and suggests that while neither parents nor teachers can resolve them on their own, communication between teachers, parents and concerned community members could evolve platforms for discussion of strategies for collaborative action. From discussing the imperatives for communication and collaboration, the chapter moves to report the initial ideas offered by participants for ways of fostering better communication and engagement.

Chapter Eight reports the practice of one particular head teacher who moved beyond the constraints that exist and created ways to engage with parents by going to meet them on their own home ground. It reports how he was obliged at first to take these initiatives on his own, but how he gradually involved his colleagues and other members of the community in his enterprise. It identified the personal qualities and attitudes that make his initiatives work.

The final chapter summarises the findings of the thesis and examines their implications for policy, practice and further research. It argues that implementation of policy for parental engagement requires careful consideration of local conditions and that strategies for such implementation need to involve those who are working in the local context and who have themselves evolved strategies to create communication, trustful relationships and engagement. It offers a model action-for-engagement that springs from local rural conditions and possibilities. It further suggests that, while the findings of this study arise

from the context of one rural community in Bangladesh, there are implications of the findings that may well have relevance for rural communities in other countries.

Chapter Two: Context

The key aim of this chapter is to offer readers a door into the rural context in Bangladesh and its schools. Firstly I describe aspects of Bangladesh as a whole, then its overall education system and then the rural context and practices that are important to my study. My descriptions are drawn from both my own experience and from published sources.

As an introductory example, I will take the term *farmer*. In Bangladesh for the most part farmers are humble people who are landless and work as day labourers. Those who own the land and take the greatest benefit from agriculture would not use the term farmer to describe themselves. On the other hand in New Zealand farmers are usually owners of substantive blocks of land, turn over significant amounts of money, and feel proud to be called farmers.

Variations in the relationship between language and concepts may not only occur from country to country, but also within a country. For instance, *puri* is a food item that is available in food courts all over Bangladesh, but in a particular district it is a term used for addressing a woman. So, there is risk of embarrassment if one were to ask for *puri* in a food court in that particular district.

In a conversation with an academic colleague about my field work experiences in winter, she said she always thinks of Bangladesh as a hot country. However, Bangladesh has six seasons and one of them can be very cold. The conversation made me very aware of the importance of context and the need to explain it to readers. Issues and practices that are at the core of this thesis, such as parenting and schooling, have considerably different connotations in different national contexts, and even within different Bangladesh contexts. Kabir and Akter (2014) and Amin (2017) noted differences in parental attitudes and actions between urban and rural areas, between low socio- economic and high socio-economic backgrounds, and between literate and illiterate conditions. The intention of this chapter is to provide a rich description of the context of this study and so build a basis for readers' understandings of the data presented and avoid misinterpretations on the basis of assumptions that might conflate the context of Bangladesh with that of western countries. In this way, this chapter sits alongside the following chapter which reviews literature: it highlights ways in which the conditions in my study may be different from those that contextualise findings and recommendations by various international authors.

This chapter seeks to describe and explain the social, cultural, economic, political and educational context of this study. Greenwood (2016) asserted the epistemological importance of *place* in research. She argued that historic and current discourses that circulate in any particular place as well as its physical and socio-economic conditions impact not only on how people live but also on how they make meaning in their lives. Sobe and Kowalczyk (2012) argued that context needs to be given close attention throughout the research process in order to recognise power and knowledge relationships and so to understand practices. In their discussion of the possibilities of reciprocal learning through parental engagement in rural schools in the United States, Semke and Sheridan (2012) emphasised the influences of culture and context. I highlight the influence of context throughout this report of my research and so this chapter seeks to connect the readers with the *place* of my research and to provide a description of parents' lifestyles, customs, culture, knowledge systems, and of the nature of rural schooling. Thus I seek to help the reader understand the contextual needs for, and problems with, parental engagement.

Location of this study

Bangladesh is located in the southern part of Asia, covering 147,570 square kilometres of total land (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [BBS], 2015) and is the 92nd largest countries in the world by area. It is bordered by India and Myanmar and the Bay of Bengal surrounds its southern part. The total population is 144,043,697, of whom 72,109,796 are male, and 71,933,901 are female (BBS, 2015), and it is the eighth most populous country in the world (USCB, 2017). Bangla is the native language of more than 98% of the people, and is the official language. A number of minority languages make up the other 2%. English is used as a second language, mostly used in the education system and in many areas of business, and is often spoken by middle and upper classes to indicate their educated status. Different regions have their own regional dialects and idioms.

Bangladesh is known as a developing country and its economy is increasing led by export-oriented industrialisation. The main export goods are textiles, leather goods, processed and frozen food. The readymade garments industry and remittance from overseas employment contribute significantly to the total economy. Both sectors have created opportunities for male and female workers with less education and low literacy. However, Bangladesh is known as an agriculture-based country and most of the people are directly or indirectly

related to this enterprise. Rice and Jute are primary crops. People in the rural areas are predominantly involved with agriculture, as tenant farmers or as physical labourers working on a daily basis for the land owner. Administratively Bangladesh is divided into eight main regions, which are called divisions. For operational activities, these divisions are sub-divided more into districts (zila). The districts are further divided into sub-districts (upazila), and these are divided into unions, wards, and villages.

Education in Bangladesh

The education system in Bangladesh is operated and managed centrally by the Ministry of Education. This Ministry is responsible for policy making, planning, and implementation and monitoring of the overall secondary education system. Under this administration, are four bodies: the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE), Directorate of Technical Education (DTE), Directorate of Madrasah Education (DME) and Directorate of Inspection and Audit (DIA). The National Academy of Educational Management (NAEM) and the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEISE) are respectively responsible for training and statistical records. Secondary education is overseen by nine General Education Boards, one Madrasah Education Board and one Technical Education Board for conducting and supervising public examinations, issuing certificates, recognising non-government secondary schools and approving School Management Committees (SMC).

The education system in Bangladesh is based on three main stages: primary, secondary and higher education. There are five years of prescribed primary schooling. Secondary is divided into three phases: junior secondary (classes vi-viii), secondary (classes ix-x) and higher secondary (classes xi-xii). Few rural schools offer higher secondary education. The education system is managed by two ministries. Primary education is managed by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, and post-primary Education, which covers Secondary to Higher education, is managed by the Ministry of Education¹.

Primary level education is provided both by schools within the mainstream system and by madrasah education (Ministry Of Education, 2014). After completion of five years schooling in primary education, students need to sit for Primary School Certificate (PSC)

¹ Ministry of Education is now divided into two separate divisions. 1. Secondary and Higher Education division & 2. Technical and Vocational Education division. These two divisions are now in full operation.

examination, which is centrally administered in the whole country by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education. At the secondary level, all schools are controlled by eleven boards. These boards are responsible for conducting examinations all over the country. Students sit for the Junior School Certificate (JSC) examination after Class VIII, the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination after Class X and the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination after Class XII. Higher educational examinations are controlled by the public and private universities and colleges affiliated with the national university. Separately from the general system of education, are madrasah education and technical-vocational education that are controlled by the madrasah education board and the technical education board respectively.

Dominant role of examinations

For both teachers and parents examination results have become the dominant goal in the education system in Bangladesh (Amin, 2017). Thus examination results have become the main, and perhaps only, tool to evaluate the performance of students and institutions (Prothom Alo, 2015 May 30). Recently, the Education Minister stated: “If we repeal PSC and JSC examinations then half of the student will drop out from their education”. He further explained that the government introduced these two examinations to use the power of the results and certificates to dissuade parents from letting their children drop out (Prothom Alo, 2017 July 13). However, as a result of emphasis on examination results, teachers tend to pay less attention to national curriculum goals. Parents, who can afford to, seek to provide private coaching for their children to increase their chances of achieving good examination grades. This situation is allowing businesses to open coaching centres for students and teachers to engage in coaching and private tuition.

The government, as well as various daily newspapers and TV talk shows, celebrates public examination results (Prothom Alo, 2016 August 18). Just as schools publicise their percentage of successful students, the government also publicises the annual national pass rate and constructs it politically as an achievement that shows educational progress. As I talked to various teachers, I found that there is internal competition between education boards about examination achievement. This prioritisation of examination results appears to prevent educators at all levels dealing with implementation of the curriculum

The explicit curriculum goals of Bangladesh are to develop in students the types of knowledge, skills and attitudes that will equip them to be ethical and productive citizens and contribute to the nation's development process (Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah & Rahman, 2010). To ensure these goals the government has developed policies and planned implement through bodies including the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB), and the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE). However, it is always a challenge to implement policy in the grounded context (Das, et al., 2014; Rahman, et al., 2010). A range of factors such as large classrooms, inadequate provisions for teacher training, economic constraints on both teachers and parents are blocks to the implementation of the mandated curriculum (Amin, 2017; Alam, 2016; Thornton, 2006).

Management system in non-government secondary schools

There are 339 government schools in Bangladesh and 19,508 non-government schools. Non-government secondary schools are operated, monitored and managed by the local School Management Committees (SMC) (BENBEIS, 2017). An SMC is formed with 13 members from different kinds of representation elected by a competitive election, and is expected to include a president, a member secretary, a donor member, four parent representatives, one female parent representative, an educational enthusiast, two teacher representatives and one female teacher representative. The head teacher is responsible for the running of a secondary school and is a member secretary of the school managing committee. The quality of academic education in non-government schools depends to a large extent on how the SMC operates the school. By government requirement the SMC plays a dominant part in school management and is responsible for assembling resources, controlling expenditure, budgeting for school development, teacher and staff recruitment, ensuring the quality of education and the conduct of co-curricular activities (Ministry of Education, 2009). The aim of ensuring community participation in secondary school management was a primary reason for the government to implement this form of management structure (Ministry of Education, 2004).

According to the national curriculum plan, secondary schools are responsible for developing in students the knowledge, skills and attitudes for individuals to fit into society as well as the development of the society as a whole (Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah, & Rahman, 2010). Therefore the improvement of secondary education is currently a high priority and attention is given to improving management systems (Hoque, 2007). The

management of secondary schools takes place at two levels: national and local. At the local level secondary schools are administered by the school management committee which is responsible for the proper use of resources as well as ensuring competent school leadership. However, it has often been claimed that many secondary schools suffer from inefficient management (Hoque, 2007; Behrman, Deolalikar & Soon, 2002). The government plans changes in educational administration to reduce the gaps and to increase the awareness of SMC members about their duties, responsibilities and commitment to the successful expansion and improvement of quality education (National Education Policy, 2010).

Rural Schools

In Bangladesh, nearly 78.30 % of the secondary schools are situated in rural areas (BANBEIS, 2016), and the conditions of rural secondary schools have many features in common. Karim (2004) argued that the infrastructures of rural secondary schools are not appropriate for effective teaching and learning, because classrooms are not well equipped for group work, pair work, role play, and in some classes teachers cannot easily move from one place to another in the room. Rasheed (2017) stated that classroom conditions and the large numbers of students often prevent teachers from calling students to the front to work on the blackboard. Ansarey (2012) argued that teachers are required to teach too many classes in a day, with the result that they cannot plan effectively to meet the needs of their students. However, Mehtab (2012) noted that many teachers are developing an interest in creating lesson plans that will make teaching such overcrowded classes possible and more effective.

Physical facilities and the quality of teachers are important determinants of any school's performance. In contrast the infrastructures and facilities of most urban schools are better than those of rural schools (Prodhan, 2016; Behrman, Deolalikar & Soon, 2002). Urban schools also tend to have better educated teaching staff compared to their rural counterparts (Amin, 2017).

Where my study takes place

I came to understand the importance of the *place* of my research in different ways. First of all, I was given insights by my participants. During our interviews they frequently talked about their local context and I was curious to know about their culture, lifestyle,

social values and thinking. In addition, I spent a long time in the area both for my previous work and for my research and talked with a wide range of people from the locality. I had the opportunity to explore the physical site as well as meeting the people and to come to understand their ways of thinking.

This study was conducted in a rural area in one particular upazila (sub-district). As I explain in Chapter Four, I do not give its real name in order to preserve the anonymity of my participants. I call it Ratanpur. This upazila is divided into several unions, wards and villages, and covers an area of 3414.35 square km., and has a density of population of 1056 people per sq km. The upazila headquarters are the centre of local government, and all unions are closely linked with the headquarters. Formal institutes, the *Upazila Parishad*¹ and the *Union Parishad*, represent local government. The upazila chairman and union parishad chairman, respectively, are the chief members of the locally elected bodies. All government development projects are associated with these local governments, which have a link with the central government. The members of the bodies are key players in their communities.

My study takes place at various union level secondary schools in an upazila that is situated on the bank of a river which is one of the biggest in Bangladesh. The population of this area is 3,605,083, with 1,757,370 males, and 1,847,713 females. The literacy rate (7 years and above) is 46.8 % and the school attendance rate (5-24 years) is 54.9%². The area has strong communication links with the whole country, and the communication systems with headquarters and union levels are also good: the roads where heavy transport runs are known as *paka rasta* (পাকা রাস্তা)³. However, the local roads are not in good condition and are known as *katcha rasta* (কাঁচা রাস্তা)⁴. This area is often affected by flood so that the land structure has been changing every year. During flood time, farming land is drowned by water and most of the people who are involved with day-basis work become jobless. There is a popular song in Bangladesh that describes this impact of nature:

¹ Parishad is an administrative system of local government.

² Source not given, because it identifies the location.

³ পাকা রাস্তা; concrete roads

⁴ কাঁচা রাস্তা; soil roads.

নদীর এপার ভাঙে ওপার গড়ে, এইতো নদীর খেলা River breaks one bank and rises on another
side of the land, and it is the natural game
of the river.

Geographically this area is separated into two parts; one part is known as *char*¹, and people from this area are called *chaira*; the other is *bir*², and people from this area known as *bira*. Most of the people from the char area struggle in their life, compared to those from the bir area; it is common for them to shift their house from place to place every year during flood time. That is why they do not invest much money in their homes, as well as because of their poverty. Those who are financially strong shift their house to the bir area when they are affected by flood and enrol their children in a different school. Those students struggle to continue their study.

Most of the houses in this area have been built from bamboo, wood, tin, reeds and jute, and are known as *katcha ghor*³. Those who are financially stronger have houses made of brick and corrugated iron. Those who are living as a single family have one or two rooms and a separate kitchen. Families who have a cow sometimes have a separate shelter for it. Those who lives as a joint family may have more buildings. Some wealthier families may have a guest room, a separate kitchen, a separate cow's house and other places for other domestic animals.

People from this area habitually speak in their local dialect. People who work in the field and other labouring work wear traditional dress, like *lungi*, *genji*, *pajama* and *punjabi*⁴. Those who are financially strong normally wear a shirt and pants outside their home, as do teachers. Such variations in clothing create visible social, differences.

The main roads, *pakka rasta*, support transport by bus, truck, rickshaw, van, CNG, motorcycle, cycle and other vehicles. The internal roads between and around villages are mainly *katcha rasta* and only support the light means of transport, like small vans, pushcarts and rickshaws, that are used by the local people for transport and work.

¹ Char is a river island.

² Bir is plain land.

³ কাঁচা ঘর; rough house made of mud or reeds.

⁴ Traditional clothes in Bangladesh.

Most people in this area are dependent on agriculture as their main source of income. Because it is situated on the bank of the river, this area has different types of land: rice, jute, mustard and wheat are the main crops inland, and nuts, sugarcane, sweet potato, sesame, linseed, pepper and onion are main crops in the char area. Seasonal vegetables are also grown.

The daily life of farmers is hard. In the morning they will usually get up before dawn, break their fast with rice that was left over from dinner¹, and take a similar bundle of food with them for lunch to eat in the field under a tree and even under the hot sun. The traditional food of this area is rice, fish, meat, dal and vegetable, as in most other places in Bangladesh. Villagers mostly dependent on vegetables and dal and some of them catch fish from the river or buy it from the various local ponds. Meat is only eaten very occasionally on special occasions and involves a long term plan, as is described in Chapter Eight. Villagers will have their dinner of rice and a small curry item at night. They usually go to bed early or sometimes spend a few hours outside their home chatting with people. As in urban areas, when they visit someone's house they usually bring a sweet item or chips, and when someone visits their house they offer food: tea, biscuits or homemade sweet items.

Most of the people in this area are struggling to survive in their daily life. Many of them are involved with agricultural work: some work their own field and are known as owner-cultivators but most work as day labourers in the others' fields and locally they are known as krishok², or peasants. Their regular job is to dig the land, provide water in the field, clean the field, plant the seeds, cultivate the crops, and carry them to the owner's house. They work in the field until sunset. They are paid on a daily basis, about 200 to 250 taka³ a day.

Other groups of people are engaged in keeping poultry, milking a cow, fishing, and servicing transport, as with the three wheelers that runs on CNG and are simply called CNGs. A few people are engaged in commerce and services. There are some area-wise

¹ Korkora vat (কড়কড়া ভাত) in the winter, and pantavat (পান্তাভাত) [remainder of rice after dinner with water] in summer time.

² কৃষক (Farmer).

³ 5 to 6 NZ\$

daily bazaars and weekly hat¹ in the area and some people have or work in stalls there. Some work in the garments industry; some are labouring abroad with a work visa. People who are Hindu often work in particular kinds of jobs that include barbers, fullers, blacksmiths, potters and carpenters.

There are some individuals in this region who have a good level of income. They have their own cultivable land, own a business, are contractors with different government development activities, own a big cow farm, hold a government job, have an administrative job in the garments sector or are in the military. However, those who can afford it send their children to schools that they consider offer better education.

Two types of the family are seen in this area; one is the extended family and the other is the nuclear family, known locally as joint and single families. Large numbers of family members live in the joint family: grandfather, grandmother, brothers, their wives and children. There is close bonding between members of a joint family: everyone follows the instruction of the grandfathers, grandmothers and other seniors. Married sons and their wives usually stay with their parents. They obey and respect seniors, and traditionally female members do not take food before the men. Junior members address the seniors based on the relationship, not by name, for example grandfather as *dada*, grandmother as *dadi*, uncle as *kaka*, senior brother as *vaia*. Seniors are usually fond of and indulgent towards juniors. However, these family bonds and the respect within them are changing considerably over time and people are moving into single families, often after the death of their father. In the joint family with its large number of members there are often two or three persons who earn to cover the expenses for all members. Sometimes an individual may need to cut down his or her children's educational expenses in order to contribute his share to the family. There is an obligation to consider the whole family's needs rather than personal ones, such as children's education. So continuing a child's education and the expenses involved requires the earning of extra money.

There are two major religions in this area: Muslim and Hindu. Each has its own religious festivals, lifestyle and social activities. *Durgapuja*² is one of the main religious festivals

¹ Another kind of market, where people sell various types of items with lot of people's presence and held once or twice in a week.

² Durgapuja (দুর্গাপূজা)

for Hindu, and the celebration which centres around the temple¹ continues for several days. Eid is the main religious festival for Muslims. Eid means *khushi* or happiness. There are two Eid celebrations. One is Eid Ul Fitr. On that day in the morning men take a shower, wear new punjabi and pajama and go to the *eidgah* for Eid prayer. After prayer they visit to do *kola kuli*, Eid greetings. Women make special foods, both sweets and spicy. They offer them to whoever comes to visit on that day. People meet friends, relatives and others in a festive mood. The other is Eid-UI-Adha which older people locally call *borki Eid*² or *boro Eid*. On this day people sacrifice a cow or goat and distribute it to their community, neighbours and relatives. People tend to belong to different small *shomaj*, or communities, and after sacrificing their animal they distribute the meat within their shomaj to those who sacrificed and to those who could not, to ensure everyone's happiness. For these two festivals, urban dwellers and even overseas migrant workers come back to their own village to celebrate with their parents, relatives and neighbours.

People try to celebrate these big occasions with all the community and there is a natural festive mood. These celebrations have impact on people's lives as they need to plan for the festive celebration and to save money for it. However, poor people often do not have capacity for celebration when they are struggling with their daily needs.

Historically, people of this area live within their own community society, which is known as a *shomaj*³. Muslims and Hindu have their own shomaj, and there are various other groupings, like around villages. In every occasion people invite others from their shomaj to celebrate and it deepens the bonding between them. In a crisis of any kind people from a shomaj stand beside one another. Every shomaj has a leader, who is addressed as *Matbor*⁴. He is the influential person in the shomaj, who plays a vital role to unite people and try to minimise conflicts between them. If someone feels they have been wronged, it is a common tradition to go to the matbor and complain to him, asking for arbitration. Therefore, for small issues, the villagers do not need to go to the court. The matbor acts like a judge in a process known locally as *shalish*⁵ or arbitration. The matbor's favour is

¹ Mandir (মন্দির)

² While *bokri* Eid is the usual expression throughout Bangladesh, *borki* is common in the local dialect.

³ সমাজ (Small form of society or a group of people within a village).

⁴ মাতবর

⁵ শালিশ

needed for running a school smoothly: if he does not have good relations with the school then he can influence the parents to take their children and send them to another school. A Matbor can also play a positive and vital role in engaging parents with the school and supporting school improvement initiatives.

The informal leaders of each community are often willing to join formal institutions as a chairman, and the community people also want to see their representative in the official institutions. Political issues come into play here, and the wider community is often divided over many issues because of their desire to secure local group representation. It is common for everyone to be actively involved with these activities, and it may be hard to find anyone who is neutral because non-involvement could cause lack of community support in other matters. Most of the people always try to go with the flow. Locally this is called *village politics*. Different types of divides occur because of political ideology or social or positional conflict.

Community people also try to exercise their power in a school's decision-making processes. Each cluster of the community people wants their representation in their school's management. Schools are community institutions: most of the non- government secondary schools have been established through initiatives of community individuals and a school's management includes representation of parents, community and teachers. Community people from every cluster want their representation in the school and sometimes even the political power such representation can bring. In some areas this may create problems for school development initiatives. In the recent past, it has been observed that there is often a nexus between national and local politics and the central political parties are influencing village leadership. This may come down to school level especially at the time head teachers and even teachers are recruited, with local leaders of political parties seeking to recruit teachers of their political persuasion.

Poverty in the rural context

People who are unable to buy their necessary daily goods for a family are considered below the poverty level. Fadeeva (2014) found that approximately 26% of people in Bangladesh live below the national poverty line of NZ \$2.70 per day. And that about the rate in rural areas rises to 36%. These people struggle with food, do not have land and assets and are mostly uneducated. 29% of the rural population who are considered

moderately poor have food, some land or small types of business. Another report from the Asian Development Bank (2016) showed that approximately 31.5% of the population lives below the poverty level in Bangladesh. Almost eighty percent of total people of the country live in the rural areas, and the level of poverty is higher there than the urban areas (Ferdousi & Dehai, 2014).

Income disparity is evident throughout Bangladesh. While the percentage of wealthy people is not very high there are individuals who enjoy a very high standard of living. However, a majority struggle to earn a living. Bangladesh is an agriculture based country and most of the people are landless and so do not have opportunity to cultivate their own land. They engage in cheap labour and are sometimes jobless at the same time as they struggle to earn food for family survival. The government of Bangladesh has initiated various programmes, such as Test Relief, Work for Taka¹, Work for Food, Vulnerable Group Feeding, Vulnerable Group Development. The government also has a programme of 40 days employment generation to enable poor people to survive (Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief [MoDMR], 2016). Accessing secondary and higher education for their children is a nightmare for families which are stressed with meeting basic needs, such as health care and sanitation, although the government is giving importance to improving their situation.

However, there are different social layers in the rural context and they are variously defined. Islam (2014) defines people in terms of as lower class, middle class and upper class, whereas Mozumdar (2008) defines them in terms of landless, poor peasants, middle farmers and wealthy peasants. A small number of people do hold economic capital in the rural community and they are treated as the cream of the society. They have opportunity to access education and social differences between the educated and not educated are emerging over time (Banglapedia, 2015).

Impact of seasons

Bangladesh is blessed with six different seasons, each with distinct features and lasting two months. Seasons come with different blessings like seasonal fruits and fresh vegetables, and people make seasonal cakes. In flood time people get better opportunities to catch fish. The changing seasons have a significant impact on people's lives in the rural

¹ Work for money

context, especially on those who are engaged with the physical work. In the summer season, the weather is extremely hot and sun shines fiercely. It becomes difficult for those who work in the fields and many become sick and cannot continue their work. Sometimes the weather stops cultivation, and that makes people jobless. In the rainy season the sky is covered with clouds most of the time and when torrential rain come the roads become very muddy. The torrential rains and floods stop school activities and stop people working because water flows everywhere. In the winter season the temperature falls and night becomes longer than the day. People need to wrap up in warm clothes in daytime and with a blanket at night. Poor people suffer a lot in this season because of their inability to buy proper clothes as well as because of the condition of their houses which are not protected from heavy wind and fogs and sometimes water drops from their tin roofs at night. During the seasons that reduce the availability of jobs people struggle to survive as they have few savings and run out of money, and that has an impact on their ability to cope with their children's educational expenses.

Urban-Rural Disparity

There are significant differences in access to education between urban and rural areas in Bangladesh. The context of rural Bangladesh has been described in terms of illiteracy, poverty, and underdevelopment, with visible differences from urban contexts in terms of students' socio- economic conditions, educational infrastructure, educational opportunities and academic achievement (Islam, 2015). Parents in both contexts may be aware or unaware of their children's educational needs, and may have dreams about their children's education and pay attention to their study. However, because of their economic position and because of available resources urban parents tend to be more concerned with education and devote more time to engagement with their children's schooling. Many urban parents are able to provide private tuition and coaching whereas rural parents struggle to cover school fees and other minimum costs. Alamgir (2015) reported that upper class and upper middle class parents from rural areas tend to send their children to schools in urban areas in expectation of better examination results. As a result rural schools miss out on having educationally aware parents and the support economically secure parents could contribute to school improvement.

Socio-cultural differences impact on parenting, particularly on awareness of educational needs and processes, and on capacity to provide for and spend time with children. Urban

parents in Bangladesh are renowned for their efforts to achieve high examination results for their children. They try to enrol them in high-quality schools, accompany them on their way to school and pick them up after school. They tend to show their anxiety about their children's performance, being very aware that examination performance affects their lives. They provide private tuition for their children. Some parents see their children's performance as adding to their own prestige and there may even be a *cold war* among the parents. The extra pressure may sometimes impact negatively on their children.

Literacy and Parenting

“The number of illiterate people in Bangladesh is larger than entire populations of some European countries” stated Rasheda K. Choudhury, Executive Director of the Campaign for Popular Education (The Daily Star, 2015, September 08). The definition of literacy has changed over time. In 1901 those who could write their name in their mother language were considered literate. Now understandings of literacy are more complex. Often there is more referred to than the ability to read and write; the ability to comprehend and explain, to source information and to manage everyday numbers is often included (Bureau of Non-formal Education [BNFE], 2014).

In the Bangladesh constitution, education is recognised as a fundamental right of every citizen of the country, and in accord with its constitutional obligation, the present government committed to eradicating illiteracy by the year 2014 through its election manifesto (BNFE, 2010). However, Education Watch 2016 reported that the progress of literacy in Bangladesh is slow although there are advances: they found a literacy rate of 41.4% in 2002, and in 2016 they found 51.3%. The rate of increase per year is 0.7%, and so they assumed that developing all citizens with literacy skills would need forty-four more years (Nath & Chowdhury, 2016).

Literacy is not regarded as an obvious need by everyone. If we look at Bangladesh, and possibly many other countries, and examine how illiterate people are running their daily lives, we could see that many are running their business without any literacy, calculating their loss and profit from their everyday sales. Some have been reported to be able to run a pharmacy business, despite their illiteracy, somehow managing the need to read the names of medicines. So how can literacy be made to be an important goal for illiterate people? And what changes would come into their lives after becoming literate? People are

involved with their various jobs, and if there is no improvement that comes to their ability to earn a living after receiving literacy, then a campaign to make them literate will not work.

Moreover, the term *literacy* is now being applied to the ability to negotiate different fields, such as *computer literacy* and *science literacy*. Theorists (such as Tanvir, 2011) have argued the need to redefine the term literacy based on context. There is discussion of *health literacy* (Kickbusch, 2001). The daily newspaper, Prothom Alo (2017, January 14) reported that the Bangladesh Securities and Exchange Commission (BSEC) has taken initiatives to teach clients about investment in a programme named *A B C D in Investment*. However, *parenting literacy* is not commonly examined. Perhaps the Ministry of Education could follow the investment model and introduce a programme for parents aimed at helping them develop awareness and skills to support their children's schooling.

Teachers' position in society

In Bangladesh teachers belong to a highly respected position and are considered the most learned people in the community, and so they are habituated to receiving respect from all people in the society, from child to old (Kabir & Akter, 2014). They are normally greeted with *Salam* by people everywhere and addressed as *Sir*. Teachers are also often acknowledged by the term Master. In many cases the most renowned and experienced teacher in a community acquires the master title as a normal name and sometimes their home also is identified by this title, as in *Master bari*, the teacher's home. A phrase such as "my house is near to the Master bari" may commonly be heard within many rural communities.

Traditional, because of respecting teachers from the core of their heart, parents would take their children and urge the teacher: ছেলেটাকে দিয়ে গেলাম, মানুষ করে দিয়েন, হাড় আমার আর মাংস আপনার. The meaning of the sentence is: *please prepare my son as a human, to do that, please remember, bones are mine and meat is yours*. In this way parents would transfer their responsibilities to the teachers and give symbolic permission to the teachers to punish the student if it was required for the betterment of their education. However, times have changed, and considering the negative impact of punishment on students' formative minds the Ministry of Education have circulated a rule to stop corporal punishment of students.

Twenty-five to thirty years ago people who achieved a Bachelor or Master degree would feel proud and would use the MA and BA title with their name to compete for jobs and to acquire social status. However, this scenario is changing daily as an increasing number of people are completing higher education. At the same time dedicated and educated people are not choosing teaching as their preferred profession. People become teachers when they fail to get a job in any other professional sector.

Recreation

Recreation is important to everyone's daily life and people who live in urban areas in Bangladesh have a range of options for their entertainment. Compared to the urban population, rural people have limited opportunity to refresh themselves from their hard life. Television which has just become available in the last decades now plays a vital role in recreation for rural people. Bangladesh Television (BTV) used to be the only television channel until 1998. However, the availability of satellite television has increased and that brings other options. Nevertheless most rural people do not have the capacity to buy a television set. So, for recreation, women often go to neighbours' houses to watch their favourite programmes and men often watch in public places, such as tea stalls, clubs and any shops that have television (Hossain, 2011). Students in the rural areas also often watch movies and other television programmes in those places; spending their time there instead of focusing on study. Some parents do not seem to pay much attention to this behaviour, as is discussed further in Chapter Seven. In a rural area, there is a limited choice for entertainment.

Most of the people from the rural area that was the site for my study are low paid workers and they do not have many leisure facilities in their daily life apart from their gossip and television in a tea stall. Most of the tea stalls have a television set for their clients and I had many opportunities to spend time with local people in the tea stall and just talk to them. Sometimes I would just sit in the tea stall, have tea and listen to people gossiping about one topic or another. I was very curious about what people did and talked about outside my planned research programme. I saw that they were very conscious of the political situation in the country, and were also quite rigid with their political choices. I did not see anyone compromise their opinion about any political issues. Their analysis of political issues and their general critical awareness provoked me to think about how their understanding and knowledge could be turned into awareness of the educational needs for

their children and of their own responsibilities and possibilities in that area. If a complex issue like politics can make sense to them, then why not their children's education?

The tea stalls play various movies, songs and dance videos to attract customers all the time the shops are open. However, they also have a negative impact on students and their schooling. Prothom Alo (2017, May 29) reported that: "Tea stalls near by the school look like mini cinema halls". Students pass through the tea stall on the way to their school, have their attention caught by a movie on the television set, start watching the movie and forget to attend school.

Sometimes in Bangladesh the indulgence for recreation becomes excessive, and even addictive, for students, and for housewives. More precisely, they become addicts to various television serials from India. These programmes sometimes impact on a student's mind very strongly.

The more alarming aspect is that some try to apply what they see in the serial to their practical lives. Following their favourite serials, they may try to buy their favourite of the dresses worn by an actress they admire. Inevitably parents from low socioeconomic backgrounds fail to fulfil their demands. There have been reported cases when young people have been shocked by their parents refusal and even committed suicide (Kamal, 2014). Television serials are acknowledged to be killing students' precious study time at home. Many parents become helpless and cannot stop their children watching television. There have been reported incidents of extreme conflict when parents took a stand to stop wasteful television watching and insisted their children study. In one such case a newspaper reported that a school girl committed suicide when her parent scolded her for watching television serials (The Daily Star, 2016 May 01). There have been movements within the country to ban certain television channels. Recently a lawyer served a legal notice to the government to stop certain channels which he claimed were hampering students' education, changing their regular activities and damaging homemakers (The Daily Star, 2017, January 25).

An additional issue is that the movies, many of which come from India, bring different cultural values from the traditional village ones and portray behaviours that young boys growing into adulthood are keen to copy. One of these is the practice of *eve-teasing*, a form of harassment of girls that is often carried out by groups of immature boys. This is further discussed later in this chapter and again in Chapter Seven.

Unemployment

In addition to poverty, the unemployment rate for both educated and uneducated people in Bangladesh is creating a vulnerable situation. The growth of unemployment among educated people is a new and real problem. Educated people from a low socio-economic background face a double problem if they do not find employment because they not only fail to get an income but they consider they have lost their educational investment. A further problem arises for educated unemployed people because they do not feel comfortable to look for and engage in any manual work.

According to International Labour Organisation database (The World Bank, 2016), the growth rate of unemployment in Bangladesh is 4.1% a year. The combination of expanding access to higher education and the lack of professional job opportunities is causing the rate of unemployment among educated people to rise every year. This national situation impacts negatively on people from low socio-economic backgrounds and sometimes demotivates them from investing in their children's education. The International Labour Organisation [ILO], (2016) reports that around 40% of young people in Bangladesh who are aged between 15- 24 years are not in education, official employment or training. Many of these young people who do not have opportunities to involve themselves in work spend their time without any creative activities and engage with various anti-social activities.

The growth of unemployment is impacting negatively on the educational expectations of rural parents with low socio- economic backgrounds. It is compounded by a prevalent social rumour that education is not enough to get a job without political influence or a healthy amount of money for donation, or bribe. Rakib (2016) reports the case of an academically worthy student from a low socio-economic background who was disregarded in the employment sector after spending money earned by bone-breaking work. A central politician spoke out publically in the movement against the system of bribes for getting a job in the capital city. He announced that if anyone could tell him that he got a job without a bribe he would arrange a reception for him and frame his photo to hang in the press club as an example to the whole country (bdnews24.com, 2017, April 20). While there are no doubt many exceptions to such a generalisation, appointment on merit alone is one of the challenges for Bangladesh. It is an issue that affects many rural parents' attitudes to education, as is discussed in Chapter Six.

Private tuition

Private tutoring is a practice that is common throughout the worldwide education system. Bray (2007) described it as a shadow education system. The importance of and necessity for private tutoring varies in different contexts. In Bangladesh it is seen as a major problem. To begin with the large number of students in a class, and inadequate infrastructures and resources do not allow teachers to provide support to individual students in the classroom. Therefore students always seek extra tuition time. Teachers' economic needs and students educational demands provide key reasons for a flourishing trade in private tuition in Bangladesh. Educated and well-established parents who actively seek private tutoring for their children also play a role in the running of private tutoring businesses in Bangladesh (Nath, 2008).

Private tutoring takes a range of forms. Some practices are one-to-one and take place in a student's home or a teacher's home. That mainly occurs in urban areas and in rural families that are financially solvent. Other forms of tutoring take place with small or large groups of students. In most cases, the teacher conducts tuition in the classroom or sometimes hires a place or uses his home. If there is enough of a demand for such private tutoring, it takes a business form and is known as coaching. The owner of the coaching centre hires a space with two or three rooms and recruits part-time or full-time teachers. It would be hard to find any teacher who is not involved with some degree of private tuition.

Private tutoring has a significant effect on a total household budget (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2013). Besides the financial impact, it has another impact on students which accentuates socio-economic differences and the rural-urban divide. Parents in urban areas tend to be more competitive to achieve a good result for their children by any means, and, therefore, they send their children for as much private tuition as possible. Sometimes a silent form of competition operates between neighbours and friends that motivates them to send their children for more private tuition (Mohua, 2015). An opposite scenario can be observed in the rural context in Bangladesh where parents are struggling to provide their children's basic needs and cannot afford private tuition. Private tuition creates extra pressure on poor people who cannot bear the expenses. When they observe the initiatives by the rich people for their children education, they are further demotivated. Parents from low socio-economic backgrounds often consider that education is for rich people, not for the poor.

The students who get opportunities for private tutoring are predominantly from urban contexts and have parents who are financially solvent, and also those who are already performing well academically (Bray, 2007). Students throughout Bangladesh need to appear in a centrally organised public examination with the same question paper. The questions are to a large extent predictable and they are well rehearsed in coaching centres. Consequently, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds who cannot afford private tuition often fail to compete with those who can get it. Moreover, private tuition practices reinforce gender inequality in rural contexts, where males are given more chance for private tuition than females (Nath, 2008). The government has developed rulings to reduce the business of coaching, but so far they have not been successful. It has been argued that, rather than the circulation of laws, social awareness and, in particular, parents' knowledge, is needed to improve the situation (Rashid, 2016). The impact of private coaching is further examined in Chapter Six.

Child labour

Child labour is not a new phenomenon in the world; historically it was common, and it still occurs in many countries in many forms. In Bangladesh, child labour is a socio-economic reality, and the children who work in a labouring job rather than attending school are from low-income families. The child labour rate (70%) is higher in rural areas than in urban areas (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics [BBS], Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies [BIDS] & UNICEF Bangladesh, 2014). The National Education Policy 2010 extended the provision of free and compulsory education for all from the class V, as it had been previously up to class VIII. Child labour constitutes a major obstacle to achieving that, and because of poverty the need to work is a driving force. Low-income families try to escape from their poverty by sending their children to work (Ahmed & Ray, 2011).

Children in rural areas of Bangladesh are involved in various types of work but are mostly involved in agricultural work. The nature of involvement depends on their age. They are given a supporting role: sometimes they assist their parents' work, such as helping on a farm, crop watching, cattle grazing, fishing, boating and other domestic activities. Older boys might be involved in ploughing, manuring, sowing, weeding, harvesting and similar tasks.

Ahmed, Rahman & Pal (2010) surveyed students, teachers, parents and community leaders to identify the reason for student dropout from schooling and found poverty and poverty-related factors as main reasons. They also found a high dropout rate of girls in the rural context. They argued that parents who experience poverty calculate two kinds of costs with their children's education that discourages them from supporting it. One is the direct cost of schooling such as fees and materials. The other is the cost of the lost income that could be earned if their children worked instead of going to school (Sabates, Akyeampong, Westbrook, & Hunt, 2010).

Although the government of Bangladesh has a constitutional obligation to minimise child labour, the low socio-economic conditions of many families does not allow an easy way to achieve that goal. Nevertheless national and international agencies emphasise the need to engage parents whose children have dropped out from school in order to work in discussion and to encourage them to send their children back to school, and to engage other parents and communities in working to minimise the instances of dropouts from school (BBS, BIDS & UNICEF Bangladesh, 2014). The relationship between child labour and schooling is further examined in Chapters Seven.

Child marriage

While marriage is a social institution that occurs throughout the world, its importance and value varies from culture to culture. In Bangladesh, marriage carries a social obligation and accountability. However, it has turned into a burden for low-income rural families, especially for their daughter. They often try to marry their daughter at the earliest opportunity, whenever they receive an acceptable offer from another family. In such cases, they may not even consider the legal age of marriage in the country. According to Child Marriage Restraint Act (1929), the legal age of marriage for women in Bangladesh is eighteen, and twenty-one for men. Nevertheless, a significant proportion of marriages occur before the legal age, which is theoretically punishable by this law. Recently, the Bangladesh government revised the child marriage law by adding a special section to protect women victims, whereby marriage of sixteen year olds could be considered. However, Bangladesh still has 66% of girls being married before they are eighteen years old, and of these over a third get married before fifteen (UNESCO, 2016).

There is a saying in Bangladesh that: necessities know no law. The high rate of child marriage in Bangladesh reflects the saying, and one of the primary makers of need is poverty. Most child marriages occur in low income families and the rural context. Because of rural poverty a baby daughter is often considered as a burden for the household, and the family seeks to marry off their daughter at the earliest time (Verma & Srinivasan, 2014). Girls also receive less educational support from family members (Sarkar, Reza, & Hossain, 2014). The dowry system in the Bangladesh rural context creates extra pressure on low income families (UNICEF, 2016). Dowry is a traditional practice of payment by a bride's family to the groom's family who is now expected to take care of the girl. Because of the cost of the dowry, a father of a daughter is regarded as *father of an embarrassing daughter*. Social pressures in the form of neighbourhood gossip add to parental stress and reinforce the practice of early marriage in rural settings. Parents often consider investment in their girls as a waste of their money: there is little chance of future job as most rural women deal with housekeeping and look after their children. Thus the combination of social barriers and lack of concern for girls' education cause families to arrange an early marriage (Ferdousi, 2014).

The practice of early marriage is directly affecting rural girls' educational attainment. Many parents seek to cut down the expenses of a rising a daughter who will not contribute to their household, and that includes reducing educational expenses. After the wedding, a girl moves to her husband's family's house and is responsible for helping to look after that family. New brides help with housekeeping activities, such cooking, cleaning, taking care of elders and generally look after the needs of that house. The cycle is self-reinforcing. Lack of education diminishes girls' self-confidence and decision-making power. Early marriage leads to early pregnancy without knowledge of how to bring up a child. It is one of the major reasons for population growth and infant mortality. Because of the number of children in one family parent cannot provide enough education and cannot change their lifestyle (Ferdousi, 2014). Nor can they break the poverty cycle.

Most girls seem to agree with the custom of early marriage. However, there are reports of some students who are protesting against child marriage and standing up against their parents' decision. Some are reported to be taking their revenge against their parents by committing suicide (The Daily Star, 2017, April 19) and a small number of girls are taking a position against their parents' decision by sharing their problem with their teachers and law enforcing agencies. Newspapers publicised the story of Sharmin Akter, a fifteen year

old school girl who received the International Women of Courage Award this year for protesting against her parents' decision and seeking help from a law enforcing agency and so stopping the attempt to have her married (The Daily Star, 2017, March 29).

Shohel (2012) argued that it is social custom that dictates that girls should be at home to take care of family and that leads fathers to consider it their duty to marry their girls as early as they can, and that change initiatives need to come from society as a whole. Real improvement of the situation in Bangladesh needs changes in the socialisation process as well as changes in attitude to girls' education. Sarkar and his co-researchers (2014) suggested that a door-to-door initiative was need to raise awareness and also suggested that such initiatives could come from joint ventures by school and community, and that an important goal should be to increase parents' knowledge. The way parents in my study regarded the education of girls is discussed in Chapter Six.

Eve-teasing

A ruling of the Honourable High Court Division of the Supreme Court in 2011 turned the euphemism of *eve-teasing* into sexual harassment. Harassment occurs in various forms all over the country and affects women of all ages. The rate is particularly high with girls at school and college, with about 90% of girls between the ages of ten and eighteen being affected (Islam, 2012). Eve-teasing is a generic term which includes behaviours such as making bad comments, proposing a love relationship, forcibly holding a girl's hands, forcing a girl to receive love letters, taking a photo without permission, posting photos publicly, following a girl student from home to school, and even blackmail. Girls not only feel harassed and insulted, they also become morally discouraged from going to school when they face such assaults. Sometimes parents blame their daughters. Sometimes girls keep such incidents from their parents to avoid being blamed, and sometimes parents do not disclose them to teachers and neighbours, considering it a family shame and not wanting to lose respect for the family. Parents sometimes stop sending their daughters to school to keep them safe at home and sometimes they arrange an early marriage to protecting their children. Secrecy and absence of collective community support add force to the problem, and so eve-teasing plays a major role in increasing girls' dropout rates and child marriage. Hoque (2013) identified that eve-teasing creates other social problems including family troubles, mental illness and girls' suicide.

Those who do the eve-teasing are called stalkers, and sometimes they are simply young boys who try to express their heroism. Some of the behaviour is caused by the simple attraction to girls that are typical of the boys' age. Some behaviour comes as an expression of resentment about unemployment. Some boys carry out their acts of harassment confident that they can shelter behind their politically influential parents. Others are victims themselves of lack of family education, lack of social bonding, and even drug addiction (Hoque, 2013). Bangladesh has a predominantly Muslim culture in which friendships between boys and girls have certain religious restrictions and free meeting are not permitted. Sometimes the restrictions make boys more curious about girls, and when they cannot control their curiosity, they start their acts of harassment. Stalkers tend to target families who are poor and who have little power of protest, but have good looking girls. Families of the victims of eve-teasing often have a hidden fear of the stalker, and may themselves receive physical harassment from the stalker if they protest and sometimes be injured by them.

Young adolescents including students are often the stalkers. They are influenced by the media and film and curiosity about and attraction to the opposite sex. It is claimed that their behaviour is reinforced by disrespectful attitudes towards women and loss of moral and social values and that they are further motivated by the frustration caused by unemployment and inexhaustible free time. Newspaper reports argue that lack of social values; social decadence, lack of effective education, and the influence of a media-based culture are causing eve-teasing (The Daily Ittefaq, 2017, March 18). The problem and its relationship to parents' engagement in schooling is further discussed in Chapters Six and Seven.

Dropout rate

The increase of student enrolments in secondary education is considered as one of the major successes of the government. The government is providing a stipend and free textbooks to students and those initiatives play a key role in ensuring enrolment. However, students need to pay examination fees and to purchase additional books for their study which parents need to pay for and this creates pressure on parents' resources (Sommers, 2013). Retention of enrolled students is still a challenge for the government; the dropout rate in the secondary sector remains high. A recent published report, *Bangladesh Educational Statistics- 2016*, states the current dropout rate in Bangladesh is about 37.39

% (BANBEIS, 2017). Billah (2016) identifies a number of reasons for the frequency of dropouts, including parental poverty, parental illiteracy, child marriage, the parental expectation of earning from children, and students' failure to get promotion to the next class. To these could be added lack of quality education in schools, students' need for private tuition and the need to buy guide books from the market. These combined factors create extra pressure on low-earning parents and prevent initiatives by the government from being effective.

Students' dropping out from school is a common phenomenon in the region where my study took place, and I would say it is a reality in all the rural areas in Bangladesh. Ahsan (2011) argued that families' economic crises discourage them from continuing their children's education and they send them to work instead. Parents and teachers in my study voiced addressed similar issues, as is reported in Chapter Six.

Many of the issues discussed above were also raised in some way by various participants in my study and they are reported from participants' perspectives in later chapters. The discussion of the issues here has been offered as a basis for readers to understand the social, political, cultural and economic context in which my study takes place. The following chapter addresses what published literature has already explored and argued about the issue of parental engagement in school which is the direct focus of my study.

Chapter Three: Literature Review

In this chapter I review published research and theorisations that are relevant to this study. The first body of work I review involves research and theory that deals directly with parental engagement in schooling in Bangladesh. Then I review international works that examine the importance of parental engagement and the range of forms it may take. I particularly review writing that addresses the impact of socio-economic factors and identified barriers to engagement. Next I review writing about the concept of cultural capital with particular attention to work that considers its impact on parental engagement with schooling. Finally I review literature that reports initiatives to overcome the existing obstacles to parental engagement.

Parental Involvement in Bangladesh: Policy and Practice

There is a relatively small body of writing from Bangladesh that examines parental involvement in schooling. Much of what has been written may be found within research on other educational issues; the observations about parental engagement are only one factor within a wider discussion.

A number of studies have addressed, sometimes in passing, the overall importance of parental engagement. In a Master's thesis about school leadership, Ali (2011) argued that parental involvement in school was important in two aspects: one was for overall improvement of the school itself, and the other was for achieving students' academic achievement. Islam (2016) conducted a low cost intervention of establishing traditional face to face meetings between parents and teachers to see if there were changes in students' progress in a rural context in Bangladesh. From his research he found parents who attended meetings with the teachers tried to spend time with their children's education and he found that had significant effect on student learning. In a later publication, Islam (2017) reported that parental involvement improved students' test scores as well as attitudes and behaviour.

In contrast, Gomes (2015) also directly explored the impact of parental engagement in Bangladesh schools, and found that parental involvement had no apparent link with students' academic performance and coping behaviour but it did have a link to students' socialisation. Nevertheless, throughout his discussion Gomes acknowledged the

importance of parental involvement in students' education. Ali's study (2011) also described the parent -teacher connection as a measure of good pedagogy. However, a study by Kabir and Akter (2014) reported that parental involvement in Bangladesh was a relatively new concept and was still underdeveloped and undervalued. Their study highlighted barriers for effective communication and involvement. Salahuddin (2016) reported a case study of principal in the outskirts of the city who, among his other initiatives actively invited parents into the school. The principal in the study reported how the resulting communication led to the improvement of students' learning outcomes.

There are a number of studies that examine rural and urban differences in attitudes to parental engagement. The BANBEIS data base (BANBEIS, 2012) stated that the majority of secondary schools in Bangladesh are situated in rural areas. Ali (2011) reported that parents in the urban areas were more aware of and responsible for their children's education than parents from rural areas. He added that parents in the urban context were mostly educated and knew the importance of their contact with the school. Ahmad, Hossain and Bose (2005) reported that parents' education and occupation were factors that influenced their children's education, and a UNESCO Report (UNESCO Bangladesh, 2013) reported that parents' completion of higher education influenced learners' performance. Nath (2009) found that parents who never been to school showed their less interest in sending their children in school, in contrast to higher interest from those who went to school.

Ahmad, Hossain and Bose (2005) found that students' school participation rate had a strong relation with and was affected by parental income, status and education. The UNECSO Report (UNESCO Bangladesh, 2013) reported that poverty and illiteracy were working as hindrances to the advancement of Bangladesh, where 49 million people were illiterates. Ali (2011) expressed concern that in the context of Bangladesh parents from the rural areas were mostly poor and spent their time in earning for their livelihood; as a result, he argued, it was hard to create a positive attitude of parents towards the school. He stated that a different scenario was found in the metropolitan areas where parents were encouraging their children to study and spending more time with their children's education. The findings from Nath (2009) showed the reason for rural and poor parents not sending their children to school was scarcity of money so that parents were unable to spend what money they earned on their children's educational expenses. The UNESCO Report (UNESCO Bangladesh, 2013) emphasised that parental socio-economic

perspectives, arising from parents' financial and social position and their own education, had a direct relation with their children's education.

In a wider discussion of the need for parental engagement Gomes (2015) argued that parents' involvement in the home and school would improve students' academic achievement in secondary schools. Similarly, Islam (2017) reasoned that parental engagement with their children's education both at home and at school was an important way of supporting improved outcomes for students. He also stated that such types of parental support at home and school were evident in developed countries, whereas developing countries did not yet have any rigorous research to confirm this relationship. Rather, reports, such as the UNESCO Report (UNESCO Bangladesh, 2013), have shown that students who were from poor academic family backgrounds, which at that time was about 70% of Bangladesh learners, face various barriers in participation within learning institutes and approximately 78% have an inadequately supportive home environment for study, including inadequate space to read and do homework, and lack supplementary books, paper, school dress, food, nutrition and sanitation.

The UNESCO Report (UNESCO Bangladesh, 2013) asserted that although parental encouragement helped learners to attend school and complete their education, parental engagement in academic and intellectually intensive conversations was largely absent and many fathers were more interested to send their children to income related work and so stopped their schooling. Gomes, (2015) concluded that most parents in Bangladesh did not take interest in their children's education. A report by Global Development and Research Initiatives [GDRI], (2016) argued that schooling involves a short term investment and has a long term benefit for children, but found that, because of considering the short term cost, parents in Bangladesh, particularly in the rural context, were demotivated from sending their children for study.

A number of studies have focused on non-government secondary schools which, in Bangladesh, are managed locally with representation of parents by the School Management Committee (SMC). Kabir and Akter (2014) explained that through the formation of SMCs the government intended to ensure parents' representation in operation and decision making in secondary schools. Similarly, BANBEIS (2012) emphasised that empowering parents and community was one of the key purposes of SMCs. The current National Education Policy (2010) emphasised the importance of SMC members'

awareness of how to effectively perform their duties, responsibilities and of their commitment to the successful expansion and improvement of quality education. It stated:

The school/ college management committees will be strengthened with larger authority. Measures for supervision will be taken with joint participation of guardians, local persons interested in education and representative of local government (p. 75).

This National Education Policy (2010) also emphasised parent and community engagement in secondary schools to ensure quality education, resolve the dropout rate and promote educational achievement. It stated:

A working committee will be formed with teachers, guardians, students and community representatives to improve the environment of the schools at primary and secondary levels. Effective measures will be taken for higher education on the basis of an action plan (p. 61).

Kabir and Akter (2014) reported that the Government of Bangladesh has had various projects at state level for implementing its education policy in which parental involvement was an important component. Key projects highlighting by Kabir and Akter and the Ministry of Education (2015) were the Secondary Education Sector Development Project (SESDP) that was working to strengthen school management committees, the Female Secondary School Assistance Project-2 (FSSAP-2) that addressed the strengthening of educational management, accountability and monitoring, the TQI-SEP Project that set out to develop more equitable access to education and increased community involvement, the Secondary Education Quality Access and Enhancement Project (SEQAEP) which was addressing school management accountability. Kabir and Akter acknowledge that by these programmes government is trying to create a safe learning environment for the students both at home and school. The SEQAEP manual (SEQAEP, 2014) emphasised the need for parents and teachers working together, and the need to set up Parents Teachers Associations (PTA) to assist SMC and create working environments both at school and at home that were study friendly.

However, there are reports that these initiatives have not yet worked in the way they were expected to. Islam (2016) questioned the effectiveness and performance of Parents Teachers Associations (PTA) and School Management Committees (SMC). He argued

that the members who joined these committees came because of their political connections rather than from genuine concern for ways they could contribute to schools. In a further publication, he (Islam, 2017) stated his view that the educational situation of a developing country like Bangladesh could improve significantly through good interaction between parents and teachers. Kabir and Akter (2014) indicated that parents do not attend schools' programmes because they believed that they have nothing to do with their children's education. Rasheed (2011) noted that most parents assumed that the school would do everything for their children's education and that teachers were responsible for that education. Gomes (2015) suggested that the tendency of parents to avoid attending school functions when they were invited and to become involved with their children's education was caused by parental fear that they were unable to help their children.

Within the existing Bangladesh literature there are also suggestions of how to increase parental engagement. Alam (1992) argued for the Directorate of Secondary Education to strengthen its role in monitoring and supervision of school management in order to implement policy. Nath (2009) found a gap between policy and parental willingness to participate and suggested that a two-way communication was needed to improve the situation. Kabir and Akter (2014) also argued that communication between home and school was needed in order to develop parents' awareness of the value of engagement in their children's education. Gomes (2015) argued that it was not enough to create an educational environment but there was also need to help families to overcome barriers to their involvement, and he suggested that nothing would change automatically but would need an increase in the intimacy of the home- school relationship. Islam (2017) suggested that some parents needed a nudge to motivate them to meet with the teachers.

The research from Bangladesh is a small body of work. Within it there is a strong advocacy of the need for parental involvement with schools. There are policy and project documents that highlight the benefits of involvement and outline some procedures for training principals, teachers, SMC and PTA respectively. There are also commentaries on the progress, and lack of progress, in policy implementation. Reports and research has tended, with a couple of exceptions (Salahuddin, Ali, Kabir & Akter) to be quantitative exploring the relation between specified factors or summarising activities. Two of the case studies reviewed (Salahuddin, Ali) considered responsibility for the development of parental engagement as one part of the role of the head teacher. The third (Kabir & Akter) reported interviews with a small group of urban parents.

The overarching conclusion from this review is identification of difficulties with parental engagement in schooling in rural areas where parents have low income and limited education. There is clearly need for further research in this area, particularly detailed examination of parents' perceptions of barriers, of living conditions, and of any successful initiatives that occur at school level. The study I report in this thesis addresses that gap.

Parental involvement in international literature

The importance of parental engagement in children's education is a repeated theme in educational research (Epstein, 2001; Hornby, 2011; Driessen, Smit & Slegers, 2005; Hoover- Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). McNeal (2001) and Larocque, Kleiman and Darling (2011) have noted that the issue has been frequently investigated, and Hornby (2011) observed that the importance of parental engagement is acknowledged by the governments of many countries. Epstein (1987) stated that researchers, practitioners and policymakers were repeatedly highlighting parental involvement as a vital component of effective school initiatives. Sheldon (2002) characterised parents as separate entities that could collaborate with their children and teachers. McNeal (2001) argued that although there was debate about the specifics of the impact of parental engagement in their children education, various research findings had indicated an overall positive impact. Wilder (2014), in a meta synthesis, found all stakeholders, like teachers, administrators, and policy makers, recognised the impact of parental engagement on students' academic achievement and its integral role in educational reforms and initiatives.

Jaynes (2005, 2007); Topor, Keane, Shelton and Calkins (2010); and Fan and Chen (2001) found that parental engagement had a positive influence on students' academic achievement. Wilder (2014) found a strong relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement that was consistent in different grade levels. According to Bower and Griffin (2011), parental involvement is as a strategy for reducing the educational attainment gap. Porumbu and Necsoi (2013) reviewed literature to identify the relationship between parental involvement or attitudes and students' academic achievement and found evidence of the importance of parental influence on children's academic achievement. Hornby (2011) described the benefit from parental involvement as not only fostering students' academic achievement, but also helping parents and teachers as well. He stated:

For children, involvement of their parents is reported to lead to improvements in children's attitudes, behaviour, and attendance at school, as well as their mental health. For teachers, effective parental involvement is reported to improve parent-teacher relationships, teacher morale, and the school climate. For parents, involvement in their children's education has been linked to increased parental confidence in and satisfaction with parenting, as well as increased interest in their own education (p. 02).

Downey (2002) reviewed research evidence relevant to understanding the relationship between children's performance in school and parents' attendance at the school events and conferences and he found that parental participation in various school programmes was a way of giving a message to children that their parents valued their education and that such messages had positively influence on students' academic lives.

Parental engagement has been variously described as multidimensional (Fan, 2001; Catsambis, 1998), complex (Khan, 1996) a wide array of behaviours, attitudes and activities (O'Hehir & Savelsberg, 2014). Larocque, Kleiman and Darling (2011) asserted that there was no one prescribed way for parental engagement. Cardona, Watkins and Noble (2009) conducted their study focusing on schooling and education of parents from culturally and linguistically diverse background and found that the achievement that could come from parental engagement depended on the nature of the engagement and where the engagement is taking place, and also depended on parents' own culture, educational background, and understanding of schooling. Hill and Taylor (2004) outlined mechanisms which affect parental school involvement and found parental involvement varied across culture, economic and community context, and from their study they highlighted parents' cultural, economic backgrounds and contexts as significant factors in parental engagement.

Wilder (2014) noted the positive implications of parental engagement. However, he argued it depended on how the school defined parental involvement which on turn was influenced by the contextual needs of the school. Jeynes (2005) simply defined parental engagement as "parental participation in the educational processes and experiences of their children" (p. 245). Sheldon's study (2002) found that parents tended to be characterised as relatively isolated individuals and he argued for the importance of positioning parents as social actors in society. Desimone's study (1999) examined the reason of different types or

ways of support for students from disparate parental backgrounds by using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, and analysing it statistically found that the relation between parental engagement and student achievement depended on parental ethnicity, income, the type of engagement, and how achievement was measured.

The international literature reviewed strongly affirms the importance and value of parental engagement and so is congruent with studies from Bangladesh. This suggests that my study deals with an issue that has potential implications for other countries as well as Bangladesh. It also suggests that it would be useful to strategically draw on international literature to better understand my findings, while remaining aware that there are differences in context that also need to be considered.

Parental engagement or involvement?

The terms *parental involvement* and *parental engagement* are often used interchangeably in educational research (Cronin, 2008). However, Goodall & Montgomery (2014) suggested that the term *engagement* carries greater responsibilities, a greater feeling of ownership of activity with more commitment than does the term *involvement*. Emerson, Fear, Fox and Sanders (2012) defined the term *involvement* as relating to participating in school-centric activities, such as volunteering, meeting with teachers, attending school events and meetings; in contrast they suggested that parental *engagement* denotes a shared responsibility between families, schools and communities. Ferlazzo (2011) defined the term *involvement* as *doing to* and *engagement* as *doing with*, and argued that in that sense engagement could play a more effective role between parents and teachers. Cronin (2008) described the term engagement as follows:

Engagement, then, can mean much more than just being involved in school-based activities and highlights the need for teachers, parents and policymakers to accord more value and attention to engagement strategies and also the teaching and learning done outside the school and particularly within the home environment (p. 48).

Emerson, Fear, Fox and Sanders (2012) defined the concept of engagement as relating to the broad arena of the role of parents in learning. In my study, I use the term engagement in a similarly encompassing way as relating to any of the ways parents could become involved with schools and with their children's learning. However, I have noted that these writers emphasise that there are differences in the quality, and therefore the effectiveness

of different kinds of school parent relationships, and I consider these in the analysis of participants' comments and suggestions in my study.

Forms of parental involvement

Parental engagement encompasses various ways that parents can involve themselves with their children's education. Sui-Chu and Willims (1996) investigated the relationship between parental background and students' academic achievement and found that, because parental engagement was linked with volunteering and attendance at meetings of parent-teacher organisations, home supervision, discussion of school related activities or parent teacher communication, parents from diverse backgrounds were not all able to involve themselves with the various school's involvement strategies, and that the nature of parental involvement varied from school to school. Catsambis (1998) noted that sometimes the forms of involvement would depend on how the researchers provided lists to their participants of different types of parental involvement, such as participation in school activities, parental aspirations for their children; and participation in children's learning at home. Hoover- Dempsey et al. (2005) from their conceptual and empirical study described involvement in the following terms:

home-based behaviours (e.g., helping with homework), school-based activities (e.g., attending school events), or parent-teacher communication (e.g., talking with the teacher about home- work), parental involvement has been positively linked to indicators of student achievement, including teacher ratings of student competence, student grades, and achievement test scores (p. 105).

Porumbu and Necsoi (2013) listed the variables for defining parental involvement that they had identified in reviewing literature:

parenting style, parental expectations and aspirations, home rules and parental supervision, communication between parents and children, children's home activities, parental attitude towards school (checking children's homework, parents' communication with teachers, and parental involvement in children's school activities) (p. 706).

Considering the different types of parental involvement, Anderson (1995) pointed to three types of parental involvement: contact with the teachers from the parent's side, teachers'

contact with parents from the teachers' side, and parental collaboration with the students in their families. Topor, Keane, Shelton and Calkins (2010) defined parental involvement in multiple ways including activities of parents at home, at school and their positive attitudes to education, school and teachers. Fan and Williams (2010) found parental engagement with school functions has an impact on strengthening parental engagement in education at home and school.

In my own study I noted that teachers often considered parental engagement in terms of parents' attendance at school-based events. In my examination of the initiatives of a particular head teacher, however, I noted that he focused on developing parents' engagement with their children's learning at home as well as with the school. These differences as well as those in the literature have prompted me to probe into different understandings of engagement that might be useful in understanding the rural context in Bangladesh.

Parental engagement at school or at home

Anderson (1995) noted in his doctoral thesis that, historically, parental engagement in education only considered involvement that occurred in the school building. However, Desimone (1999) reported how currently parents' involvement both at school and at home is considered a fundamental component of school reform initiatives. Grolnick and Slowiaczek (1994) in their study examining a multidimensional conceptualisation of parent involvement in children's schooling, considered both school and home as important institutions for socialising and educating children. Bower and Griffin (2011) conducted their study in an urban context and argued that it was important not to generalise the processes of parental engagement across every context but rather to consider the engagement process at the level of individual schools.

Findings from several research studies showed the impact of parental engagement at home was more effective than in the school (O'Hehir & Savelsberg, 2014; Stewart, 2008, Bartel, 2010, Sui- Chu & Willims, 1996). Hill & Tyson (2009) conducted a meta-analysis of existing studies to examine which kinds of parental involvement were related to achievement and they found that school-based involvement did have a positive relation with achievement but less strongly than home-based involvement. They also found that home-based involvement had a positive relation with achievement, but with home-based

involvement of parents they found a less consistent result when only involvement with homework was considered. Chowa, Masa & Tucker (2013) in a Ghanaian study found a significant positive relation between parental engagement at home and students' achievement in Maths and English, but also found that school-based parental participation was negatively associated with student achievement. They suggested this might be due to increased visits by parents to the school when students had difficulties, but noted that until there was further research the reasons were still unclear. In construct, Wilder (2014) and Jeynes (2005) found no significant relationship between parental home based assistance with homework and students' academic achievement. Fan and Chen (2001) conducted a meta-analysis to synthesise published findings about the relationship between parental involvement and academic achievement and they found parental home supervision has the weakest relationship with students' academic achievement, however, they found parental aspiration has the strongest relationship with parental involvement and academic achievement.

While these findings came from contexts that have different socio-economic and cultural factors than those of the rural areas of Bangladesh, they prompt me to be critically reflective in my analysis of what the participants in my study say about the importance or unimportance of different kinds of potential engagement. In particular, they prompt me to examine the difference in benefits between parents attending school functions and parents supporting their children's study at home.

Factors that influence parental engagement

Pena (2000) noted that parental engagement in their children's education was influenced by several factors like language, parent cliques, parents' education, and attitudes of the school staff, cultural influences, and family issues. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) identified three key factors that influence basic parental decisions for their engagement and suggested that these issues needed to be addressed in order to make a success of parental engagement:

First, parents' role construction defines parents' beliefs about what they are supposed to do in their children's education and appears to establish the basic range of activities that parents construe as important, necessary, and permissible for their own actions with and on behalf of children. Second, parents' sense of efficacy for helping their children succeed in school focuses on the extent to which parents believe that

through their involvement they can exert positive influence on their children's educational outcomes. Third, general invitations, demands, and opportunities for involvement refer to parents' perceptions that the child and school want them to be involved (p. 03).

Pena's findings resonate with the factors influencing parents' attitudes to engagement with the school that emerged in my study.

Grolnick and Slowiaczk (1994) stated that in parents' behaviour personal and cognitive factors were interconnected and influenced parental involvement with their children education. By behaviour, they referred to parental visits to school and participation in school functions, and also pointed to its positive influence on teachers. In the parental personal involvement they included children's affective experiences that resulted when children received a message that their parent cared about their schooling. Lastly they pointed out that parental cognitive or intellectual involvement stimulated students' development with their study by making home and school closer and offering an educational environment to the children. I found their discussion of the effect of parents' personal involvement on their children's affective experiences very relevant to the discussion that emerged in my study about the potential role of mothers who might themselves be illiterate.

Modifying Grolnick and Slowiaczk's (1994) conceptualisations, Grolnick, Benjet, Kurowski and Apostoleries (1997) named three levels of factors that influenced parental involvement in their children schooling. Firstly, they proposed an *Individual Level: Parent and Child Influences*, which included the level of parental involvement in the school, the influence of both teacher and student and the way parents developed their confidence with their children schooling. Secondly, the proposed *Contextual Level: Family Context* where they discussed the family and social context that is unavoidable and has influence on parental involvement. Lastly, they proposed *Institutional Effects: Attitudes and Practices of Teachers*, where they considered the importance of the home- school connection in the parental involvement process. While all these levels relate to the data that emerged in my study, I found the institutional effects particularly relevant.

In a similar way, Hornby (2011) and Hornby and Lafael (2011) described four factors that influence parents' involvement in their children schooling. These involved: *individual parent and family factors*, including parental beliefs about parental involvement, their

surroundings, perception of the invitation process and received value from the teachers; *child factors*, including the student's age, their learning difficulties and behavioural factors; *parent- teacher factors*, including various initiatives taken by the school and shaped by parents' and teachers' attitudes; and finally *societal factors*, including societal, political, economic, and cultural issues.

These various analyses of the factors that influence parental engagement are very pertinent to my study as I seek to unpack the various discourses of blame and self-deprecation that recurs in my participants' statements. I also examine the effect of both parents' and teachers' expectations and the impact of initiatives taken by teachers.

Parental self-efficacy and educational aspirations

Cardona, Watkins and Noble (2009) found that parents with high educational capital had more interest in engagement than those who had less formal education. Sheldon (2002) found that parents' individual and social networks influenced their engagement in their children education, and Hess, Teti and Hussey- Gardner (2004) found that parents' feelings about their ability to contribute to their children's education had influence on students' readiness to overcome their various educational challenges. Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara and Pastorelli (2001) found that strong parental belief in their ability to be involved in their children education motivated their children to aim for higher educational aspiration. Hess, Teti and Hussey-Gardner (2004) defined parental self-efficacy as "beliefs or judgments about one's competency or ability to be successful in the parenting role" (p. 424).

Various researchers (Fan, 2001; Fan & Williams, 2010; Porumbu & Necsoi, 2013) found that parental aspirations for their children education had a strong positive role in their children's academic success. Chowa, Masa and Tucker (2013) found that students performed better in school when they could see their parents were showing interest in their attendance at school and caring about their home study as well. Holloway, Campbell, Nagase and Kim (2016) discussed self-efficacy as the most powerful domain for parental decision-making process in their engagement, and argued that self-efficacy worked as possible forecaster of parental capability to become involved with their children's education. Jethro and Aina (2012) in investigating parental educational aspirations and values found that those who exhibited parental enthusiasm and a positive parenting style had positive influence on their children's education. Stewart (2008) found that even

parents' discussions with their children had a positive relation with students' academic achievement. Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara and Pastorelli (2001) defined aspiration as sets of options which assist parents for their engagement in their children schooling and also influence their decision making for engagement. Gonzalez-Pienda (2002) proposed six dimensions as family variables which had impact on parents' engagement with their children's education. These were:

- (a) parents' expectations about their children's achievement, (b) parents' expectations about their children's capacity to achieve important goals, (c) parents' behaviors that reveal interest in their children's school work, (d) parents' degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their children's level of school achievement, (e) parents' level and type of help provided when their children do homework, and (f) parents' reinforcement behaviours of their children's achievements (p. 259).

Wider (2014) described parental expectation as, in general, a reflection of parental belief and attitudes towards school, teachers, subjects and education. Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (2001) reported that parental aspirations for their children education had an impact on students' aspirations, particularly for their career choice and educational achievement. Jeynes (2007) argued that parental style and expectations were aspects of parental engagement which had a greater impact on student educational achievement than household rules and parental participation at a school event. Jones and Prinz (2005) reviewed the impact of the potential roles of parental self-efficacy, based on parental competence and psychological functioning, on parental engagement and claimed that parental self-efficacy influenced children's advance in their education and also had impact on parenting practice and behaviour related to schooling activities.

Coleman and Karraker (1997) synthesised the range of findings associated to parental self-efficacy and found that parental practice and parents' perception of their ability has positive impact on their involvement; and that parental self-efficacy was a predictor of parenting practice. Jones and Prinz (2005) found that high parental self-efficacy worked as a source of confidence for parents to gain and exercise the parenting skills in their children and found a converse result with the low parental self-efficacy parents. They also found that parental self-efficacy derived from various factors and the most common were parental socio-economic status and cultural context.

In these writing parental education and parental self-efficacy are identified as very important factors in determining the extent to which parents are able to engage with their children's education. Both factors are very relevant to my analysis and discussion of the practices and attitudes of the parents in my study. Chapter Six reports the degree to which these factors were evident or not evident, in the rural area I investigated.

Parental perceptions and perspectives

Radu (2011) conducted a study of parents in ten countries from South Eastern Europe using multi-national survey data, to explore parental involvement in school matters. His study found that parents with higher socio- economic status felt more efficacious and became more involved in their children's school activities than low socio- economic parents. However, he argued that successful mobilisation of the parental community by the school may create change and bring about more representative parental involvement that was not so constrained by socio-economic factors. Oundo, Poipoi and Were (2014) from their quantitative study in the Samia district in Kenya, found that parental attitudes, whether negative, neutral or positive, impact on students' academic achievement and they recommended to the policy makers to find ways of enabling parental involvement in education. Moore and Laskey (1999) from their exploratory study of the conceptual, empirical and strategic literature related to parental involvement, emphasised that in order to involve parents it was important to understand parents' perceptions, their concepts of their role, their aspirations, and their approaches to parenting, schooling and their responsibilities.

Paulson (1994) argued from her exploratory study of the influences of both parenting style and parental involvement, that parental involvement was far more important in predicting student achievement than the effect of any particular parenting, and parental demandingness and responsiveness was important in this regard. Kordi and Baharuddin (2010) from their empirical study found that parenting style had strong relation with parental attitudes and it varied from culture to culture and society to society. Their study found difference between Asian and European parenting styles, with Asian parents mostly being authoritative with their children.

Jeynes (2005) in a meta-analysis of the relationship between parental involvement and student academic achievement found that variables that indicated a general level of

involvement rather than any particular actions had the strongest results: parental expectations and styles created attitudes towards education in their children. Downey (2002) suggested that there was a substantial overlap between parenting style and parents' socio-economic status. Darling and Steinberg (1993) suggested in their model of contextual parenting style that careful investigation was needed to find how effective parenting could impact on student academic achievement in a positive way. Spera (2005) reviewed literature on the relationship among parenting practices, parenting styles, and adolescent school achievement and he concluded that effective parenting style depended on the ethnicity, culture and socio-economic status of the family. Porumbu and Necsoi (2013) suggested the need for policy makers to re-examine policies on parental involvement and implementation strategies on the basis of context, so that both parents and teachers could consider mutual responsibilities for children's outcomes. Chowa, Masa and Tucker (2013) also argued for the importance of considering context in order to determine which types of parental involvement would be most effective with the parents from a low socio-economic background.

The research reviewed in this section highlighted that parental hope and expectation for their children's education is important for their children education. However, it initially appeared that parents from my study showed little interest in their children's education. The works reviewed argue for the importance of increasing parental expectation and hope in their children's education, despite low socio economic conditions in rural Bangladesh.

Parental socio-economic background

Parents' socio-economic backgrounds (Feuerstein, 2000; Desimone, 1999), socio-demographics (Chowa, Masa & Tucker, 2013), and racial-ethnicity (Desimone, 1999) have been reported as factors that influence how parents engage with their children's education. Yamamoto and Sonnenschein (2016) examined five articles to determine the influence of parental culture, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status on parental involvement, and reported that parents' socio-economic and cultural positions had influence on parents' beliefs and engagement practices. O'Hehir and Savelsberg (2014) found that teachers' perception of parents as apathetic and not attending school were mainly forms of complaint about parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds, and Laureau (1987) found parents from lower socio-economic backgrounds did not want to consider involvement with their children's education as their responsibility.

Downey (2002) found that parents from disadvantaged families were less able to involve themselves with their children's schooling and that, as a result, students from those family backgrounds performed less well. Wang, Deng and Yang (2016) found parental belief and perception affected by parental economic and educational levels which, in turn, influenced their involvement with their children's education.

Other studies (McNeal, 2001; Sui- Chu & Willims, 1996) also found that parental engagement depended on parents' socio- economic backgrounds and parents from higher socio-economic backgrounds were more likely to engage than those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Stewart (2008) found family structure, socio-economics and ethnicity had a significant relation with students' academic achievement, and particularly that students from higher socio-economic structures and two- parent families had higher levels of academic achievement than students from low socio- economic backgrounds and single parent families.

Jones and Prinz (2005) found that parents' involvement depended on their socio-economic context and neighbourhood characteristics and that this had a possible correlation to parental self-efficacy. They found that there were differences in parenting based on the parental socio-economic backgrounds. Yamamoto & Sonnenschein (2016) highlighted the importance of paying attention to parental neighbourhoods, communities or countries, as these were found to influence parental access to academic socialisation or to block the process.

Davis-Kean (2005) examined how socio- economic status, especially parental income and education, had impact on children's academic achievement, and she found that parental education and income affected their children's educational achievement through the way they shaped parental belief and behaviour. In a large, nationally representation sample Gordon and Cui (2014) examined the relation of community poverty with adolescents' academic achievement and with parental school-related involvement and they found a significantly positive relation from prosperous communities and a weaker relation in the case of the adolescents living in the poor communities. Blanden and Gregg (2004) drew on US based literature to examine the correlation between family income and education in the UK, and they found a similarly significant relationship between family income and educational achievement in the UK as had been reported in the US. In a qualitative research project in Uganda, Drajea and O'Sullivan (2014) investigated the effect of

parental literacy and income, and their findings indicated a significant relationship between parents' income and literacy. They also found low income to be a key barrier to involvement as parents' busy schedules with their work did not allow them to spend their time with their children. Brody, Stoneman and Flor (1995) conducted their study in a rural African-American context to investigate the link with parents' financial capacity and their educational attainment with their children's education and found parents with greater financial capacity were associated with being more supportive of their children's education. Conger et al. (2002) investigated the impact of economic influences on child development, and they found a relation of economic hardship with emotional distress of parents which in turn disrupted parenting in practice.

Balan (2008) conducted a qualitative study in a rural community of Punang Kelapang in Ulu Baram, Malaysia to investigate the perceptions of involvement in their children education of Sa'ban parents who are from a low socio- economic position, and found parents from that area perceived the importance of their involvement in their children schooling. However, their concern with living, lack of time, lack of financial support, lack of education and skill and not knowing how to become involved with the schooling blocked their involvement. Hamunyela (2008) reported that implementation of plans for parental involvement in rural contexts is difficult and most of the schools conduct functions for parental involvement where parents can become involved more in non-academic activities than in academic activities. Epstein (1987) conducted a study in USA and reported that practices of parental involvement differed according to schools' decisions about what they were emphasising, and that urban schools tended to prefer to invite parents into school workshops and rural school tended to prefer home visits as their strategies to elicit parental involvement. Bauch (2001) from his study in USA defined a rural context in this way:

The context of rural has its own set of community identifiers that make rural schools dramatically different from their metropolitan counterparts (p. 204).

Prater, Bermudez and Owens (1997) examined parental involvement across three schools in the urban, suburban, and rural contexts in USA with the variables of parents' discussions, parental attendance at school, and parental supervision at home, and they found that parents from urban and suburban areas talked more frequently about school programmes with their children, and attended more school meetings and communicated

more with teachers than the parents from rural areas. In addition, they suggested the differences in involvement were that parents in the rural context were not well informed about school programmes by schools and so in turn rural parents were less interested in their children's schooling. Keith, Keith, Quirk, Cohen-Rosenthal and Franzese (1996) emphasised that parents from the rural context often had untapped or under-used resources and suggested the need for educators to consider the importance of parents in their children's education, no matter where they live. Downey (2002) conducted a study in USA and argued that the positive affect on their children education was mediated entirely by parenting practice rather than by parental socio- economic background. The context of my study, however, suggests that parenting practices are to a significant extent shaped by parental backgrounds.

A large number of the studies reviewed above concluded that parents from low-socio-economic situations were less involved in their children's schooling than those who had a higher economic status. Because families in the rural area of my study are predominantly poor, this conclusion has high relevance for my study, and prompts me to look further at the conditions, discourses, histories and opportunities that lead to the difference. Several studies from developing contexts, like Uganda, Indonesia and African-America, and USA found that parents from low-socio-economic situations were not necessarily disinterested in their children's education: they did not have the time free from work to attend to it. This conclusion prompts me to ask whether this is also the case in rural Bangladesh. Downey's research was based in the US; his conclusion that parental practice is more influential than parental economic background invites the question of the extent to which economic background may dictate practices. This seems to be the case of the rural area I have studied. However, the material I report in Chapter Eight, which describes innovative initiatives to encourage parental engagement encourages me to question whether practices are entirely determined by socio-economic conditions and whether they can be changed.

Barriers to involvement

Different types of barriers that prevent parents from becoming engaged in their children's education are identified in the literature. Hornby (2011) conceptualised barriers as the gap between what was said and what was done with the aim of parental involvement.

O'Hehir and Savelsberg, (2014) conducted their study in South Australia, and Bower and Griffin (2011) conducted a case study on African- American families and they variously

found that low parental literacy, lack of confidence, lack of time due to work commitments worked as barriers to parental engagement. Bartel (2010) found parents' time, knowledge, and skills also affected their engagement. Similarly Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems (2003) conducted a study in Florida and identified several issues that created obstacles for parental engagement:

Parents who lack the desire and confidence to become involved, educators who lack the desire to encourage parent involvement, teachers' preconceptions surrounding parental culpability, home-school scheduling conflicts, conflicting beliefs about the ways parents should be involved, vagueness surrounding the changing role of parent involvement during students' adolescent years, and lack of teacher preparation and administrative support (p. 85).

In Portland USA, Seymour (2005) investigated why parents did not get involved in school related activities and she found that most parents wanted to be involved, but not all parents were fortunate enough to have themselves received education and for that reason they did not have the skills to involve themselves. The main concern of some parents was a day-to-day struggle to survive rather than their children education; parents who worked on an hourly basis did not want to take time off and so to reduce their pay. Similar barriers of engagement were discussed by Hong & Longo (n. d). They found that parents' lack of educational experiences created problems for them to support their children's learning at home. In addition, their inflexible work schedules and their lack of understanding of the ways of engagement did not allow them to become engaged. Schools also found it hard to communicate with such *hard-to-reach* parents because of their limited staff, and did not know how to encourage them to attend in school functions.

While Seymour's study took place in an American context the Hispanic parents she studied may have had some similarities to the parents in the rural area of my study. The issues identified by Gonzalez-DeHass and Willems also suggest that even when parental economic hardship exists, it is important to look at other factors to explain difficulties in achieving parental engagement in schooling.

Social and Cultural Capital

Many of the studies reviewed above have emphasised the significance of social capital and of cultural capital. Bourdieu (1994) defines social capital in terms of the resources that

come through a person's position in network relationships. He further (2001, p. 103) argued that participation in a network group provides members "with the backing of the collectively owned capital, a 'credential' that entitles them to credit in the various senses of the world". Studies that emphasised the mismatch between the socio-economic background of parents and schools can be seen as commenting on parents' lack of access to influential social networks and therefore lack of social capital within the schooling context. This may take various forms, including lack of education, poverty, cultural differences or lack of time.

A range of studies drew attention to the connections between parents' capacity to engage and their possession of *cultural capital*. Hess, Teti and Hussey-Gardner (2004) highlighted the association of parenting competence and their self-belief with their knowledge of child development and their previous involvement with education. Lareau and Horvat (1999) included parental vocabularies and socio-emotional styles of discourse as aspects of cultural capital that could influence parental involvement with education and could advance their children school performance. Anderson (2005) argued that parental knowledge was shaped by the norms, values and rules of the surrounding society which could be discussed in terms of the notion of cultural capital. Anheier, Gerhards and Romo (1995) claimed that cultural capital acquired through parents' own education and socially acquired knowledge could influence parental capability for parenting. Cheng and Kaplowitz (2016) also found there was a strong relationship between parental economic status and cultural capital.

The concept of cultural capital is drawn from the work of Bourdieu who discusses it in terms of the culturally derived knowledge and culturally valued manners and assets that useful for social mobility and that allow holders to make use of educational and other opportunities (Bourdieu, 1985). According to Bourdieu (1986), "Cultural capital can be acquired, to a varying extent, depending on the period, the society, and the social class, in the absence of any deliberate inculcation, and therefore quite unconsciously" (p. 84). In these terms those who hold cultural capital often take it for granted and see it as something normal rather than a specific privilege. Schooling appears normal and therefore readily accessible to those whose cultural capital matches that of schools and may feel unfamiliar and excluding to those who have different backgrounds. Existing class culture in society thus becomes a dominant factor in parents' involvement in school settings. Parents perceive their involvement in their children's education based on their position in society.

Anderson (2005) argued that cultural capital was not a fixed thing within an area, and that it has possibilities to change within the same school setting. He also argued that diversification of curriculum is not enough to create equal educational opportunity: those already privileged with access are likely to gain further cultural capital through curricular support for diversity and multiculturalism.

Lareau (1987) conceptualised the different kinds of parents' perception that influenced parental involvement. Parents from lower class and working class families placed less value on education than higher and middle class families. Lareau (1987) noted that there was unequal level of parental involvement in a school because middle class families felt more comfortable about their reception than working and lower- class families. Lareau and Horvat (1999) argued that parents had developed a form of socio-emotional discourse about their position in society which was derived from their cultural capital and practices within the society. Anderson (2005) explained that parents' ability to offer a learning environment to their children came from parental cultural capital.

The concept of cultural capital and the way it identifies alignments between parents' knowledge and that valued by the schooling system is important to my study. It is further examined in Chapter Six.

Initiatives for improving parental engagement

Various research projects have focused on means to overcome existing barriers to parental engagement and to improve processes of engagement. Hornby and Witte (2010) in a study of initiatives for parental involvement in 22 New Zealand rural elementary schools found that, while there were some instances of good practice, the overall picture was patchy. They identified several weaknesses of school initiatives:

Lack of written school policies on parental involvement; minimal use of home visit; limited ideas to involve diverse parents; minimal parent education organized by school; minimal focus on parent support; the ad hoc nature of the organization of parental involvement; minimal focus on involving parents of children with special needs; and limited training for teachers on working with parents (p. 775).

As a result of the study they argued the need for training, at pre-service and in-service stages, for teachers to work with parents, and for further research to investigate useful,

appropriate and people-centred parental involvement processes in order to establish models of best practice.

Delgado- Gaitan (1991) took initiatives for four years for encouraging involvement of isolated parents in Southern California. They formed cooperative linkages between the parents by offering discussions of parents' rights as parents and by started processes of sharing parental experiences between parents. They found these initiatives developed parental awareness of their children's education.

Mapp and Hong (2010) conducted a parents' mentoring programme with a local US District Leadership team, Principals, Teachers and other school staff which explored strategies for improving parental engagement, a first initiative was to create a partnership with the parents and create a family friend culture at school. They suggested that frequent communication with the parents would shift the communicative culture from school-centric to parent-centric. They argued that sharing power between parents and teachers could change conventional beliefs and awareness. Webster-Stratton (1997) suggested introducing parental training programmes to reduce parental isolation from their children's education and strengthen support networks for the family. Decker and Majerczyk (2000) reported their action research project of increasing parental involvement in a mid-western suburb in Chicago. Their project included a newsletter for the parents with students' work and classroom activities, volunteer opportunities for the parents, seminars on parents' rights, and the keeping of records of parents' informal interactions. .

Gorinski and Fraser (2006) reviewed literature about effective engagement of Pasifika parents and communities in education in New Zealand. They reported practices of teachers organising workshops and literacy programmes for parents so they could learn new skills and parenting programmes so that they could participate in their children education. They highlighted the value of parental involvement in school decision making processes, of sharing students' progress with parents in written form, and of encouraging and stimulating parents to attend different school programmes. Lawson and Alameda-Lawson (2012) conducted an ethnographic case study in a school and community with Latino parents focusing on developing parents' engagement. They reported the positive effect of offering various seminars, and a door to door outreach effort. They found that these initiatives reduced parents' and children's isolation, family stress, cultural and linguistic differences, and fostered parent's engagement.

Bartel (2010) reported a study in Riceton, Charlestone, South Carolina and found parental time, energy, knowledge and skill affected parental involvement. He emphasised the need for teachers to understand parents' lives and help parents to improve their efforts to support their children. He also emphasised the need for schools to offer a more welcoming environment for parents. Gonzalez- DeHass and Willems (2003) stated that to improve parental involvement teachers need to consider variation of engagement practices with due regard to parents' socio- economic status and cultural differences. In order to improve parental engagement in the school, Hong & Longo (n. d.) argued for the need to work with parents to develop activities and plans for engagement that would match their experiences as well as match with the school's expectations. They stressed the need to create a space for dialogue that would build relationship and trust. In addition, they emphasised the importance of promoting parents' leadership skills and including parents in school decision-making processes.

A number of research studies highlighted the role of the principal in developing parental engagement. Ahmad and Said (2013) identified principals as the bridge between school and the community. Ho (2009) pinpointed principals as key facilitators for enhancing parental engagement in an Asian context. Griffith (2001) reported a study in a large metropolitan area in Maryland, USA, and noted that "...conspicuously absent [in research] is an empirical examination of the relation of principal behaviours on parent involvement" (p. 162). Melczko and Kington (2013) conducted a qualitative study with families of low social and economic status in the Midlands region in the United Kingdom and found that the role of the principal was crucial in introduction, implementation, sustainability and enhancement of parental involvement.

Greenwood and Wilson (2006), in their history of a long-term cross-cultural community involvement project in New Zealand, reported a formative episode in Wilson's early teaching experience. He was teaching with a rural school in a predominately Maori community. The parents did not come to the school when they were invited. One week the principal, equipped his new young teacher with farming gumboots, and took him around the rural homes to meet the parents. They drank successive cups of tea and talked positively about the students to their parents. The next parents' meeting filled the school to overflowing. If the parents were not confident to come to the school, the principal told him, the school needs to go to the community. Wilson explained that the incident helped him understand that parents were very willing to be involved with the school if they could

believe that the school really valued their presence and their input. Greenwood and Wilson (2006) further reported Wilson's long-term project for cross-cultural community involvement built on Maori values of aroha (love), manaakitanga (embracing support) and whanaungatanga (relationships).

There is a further body of New Zealand literature (Macfarlane 2007; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Te Aika & Greenwood, 2009; Penetito, 2015) that has reported engagement of Maori parents and community in education and further explored the Maori cultural values on which such engagement can be built. Riwai-Couch (2014) asserted: "educating a child in isolation from community is an antiquated belief that denies shared responsibilities" (p. 237). She argued for the need for schools to increase tribal and family involvement in education in order to enrich curriculum by local knowledge and history and to enable "students to receive and education more likely to affirm their identity". This body of writings prompts me to consider the need for Bangladesh curriculum to consider the cultural values of its communities as well as global aspirations. I return to this issue in Chapter Nine.

In a review of research evidence Downey (2002), recommended that, in order to enhance parental involvement in a community with a reported low level of literacy, interaction between parents and teachers needed to be supported by initiatives for improving parents' reading skills, reducing financial stress, providing resources to meet health and nutritional needs. He emphasised that these initiatives need to respect parents' time and suggested the school organise after- school programmes and summer activities in order to facilitate greater parental attendance.

The studies reviewed in this section proposed practical initiatives that can allow teachers, policy makers, and researchers to take steps to overcome the barriers that prevent parents from becoming involved in schooling and so maximise opportunities for parental engagement. Particularly relevant to my study are the accounts of direct action by principals in reaching out to parents who have previously felt alienated from schools. The initiatives of a rural principal in Bangladesh are reported in Chapter Eight.

Key themes from this review and their relevance to my study

The overarching conclusion from the studies in this review is the importance, in any context, of parental engagement in schooling and the acknowledgment that it may take

various forms. The body of the literature reviewed indicates that parental engagement can take place with potentially equal value both in the home and in school settings. Whether the engagement would be at home, at school or in both places that will depend on a range of decisions by teachers and on parents' preferences and capabilities.

Many of the studies argued that parental engagement is a multidimensional concept rather than a simple unified way of involving parents in their children's education. They argued that context plays an important role. In the low socio- economic rural context in Bangladesh parental engagement is a concept that is advocated by policy but is reported to seldom take place in practice. The studies I have reviewed highlight the need to find contextually appropriate ways of creating communication and fostering involvement, ways that respect existing community preoccupations and discourses but also offer ways to overcome the obstacles that currently make it difficult for parents to engage in schooling.

Chapter Four: Methodology

This chapter describes the research design and methods used for conducting this study. It explains the reasons for choosing a qualitative case study approach with an emergent design, details data collection and analysis procedures, and explains choices in the style of presentation of findings. Finally it reviews the reliability and usefulness of the findings and the ethical issues involved.

The purpose of this study has been to investigate the processes of engagement, or their absence, between school and family and explore the factors that influence engagement. As outlined in the first chapter, this study explores teachers' and parents' attitudes towards and practices of engagement, their ways of understanding their roles in education and the contextual factors that tend to hinder engagement. This aim gives rise to asking about the types of engagement processes that are taking place and about the conditions, histories and mind-sets in this region that are blocking engagement, even though it has been identified in education policy as a desired and necessary process.

One central research question has guided this study throughout. It is:

What kinds of parental engagement take place in rural schools in Bangladesh?

This central question gives rise to a number of further embedded questions. These are:

- How do the teachers perceive engagement processes in rural schools in Bangladesh? How do initiatives they take allow or not allow engagement?
- How do the parents perceive engagement processes in the rural schools in Bangladesh?
- How do parents regard the schooling of their children? How do they view teachers? How do they see their relationship with school and teachers?
- What motivates parents to go to school? And what makes them avoid going to school?
- What are issues that require parent-school collaboration?
- Are there any schools taking initiatives for improving practices of engaging with parents? And what are they doing?

Overall approach

In this study, the key focus was to explore what was really happening in terms of parental engagement with school in rural areas. As has been explained in Chapter One, national policy is placing increasing emphasis on parental engagement but at school level it is often regarded as a tick-box exercise. Moreover, the small body of research that had been conducted in this field in Bangladesh indicates that while urban parents in particular are very anxious to support their children gaining good examination grades by paying for private tuition (Nath, 2008), there is little engagement of parents within the processes of schooling. Rural parents, in particular, have frequently been described as *unaware* and *uncaring* (Kabir & Akter, 2014). This study set out to investigate what was really happening in rural schools. It explored teachers' intentions in creating opportunities for parents to engage and teachers' reactions to the responses and lack of responses from parents. It also explored parents' perceptions of the usefulness of engagement and the reasons they gave for the degree to which they were willing to engage. After collating initial reports from parents and teachers, the study further investigated the socio-economic conditions that played an influential role in shaping the nature of engagement, and the community factors that indicated that more engagement was desirable. In the process of investigation it became apparent that one school among those I studied was taking strong initiatives for improving parental engagement with their children's schooling. I therefore explored in detail what was happening in that school.

My project plan led me to work with five secondary schools in a particular rural context. Initially my plan was to work with the five schools with the same common intention of exploring their existing practices. However, during the time of selecting the schools, the Education Officer of the district, who acted as my gatekeeper, introduced one school differently. She acknowledged that this school, and in particular the head teacher of the school, was taking various initiatives to change the current situation of apparent parental disinterest. This introduction offered me an opportunity to reconsider the boundaries of my original plan and to seek out the head teacher and ask him if I could track his work. His willingness to talk to me and even to take me with him to visit homes led to an expansion of my original design. For this reason, I describe my research approach as one of emergent design.

Throughout my field work I talked individually and in group discussion with parents and teachers (and head teachers). In addition I responded to invitations from the schools I was working with to attend various meetings. Although my primary intention in these meetings was to listen, I did express my opinion when people asked me to express my opinion. I did so because that seemed a more honest way to participate in the meeting and to be respectful of my participants. Throughout the period of my data collection process, I maintained a research journal where I recorded not only my observations but also my critical reflections about what I gathered from different sources.

As I mentioned in the first chapter, I had worked for three years in the region where I collected my data. I had an excellent rapport with various groups of people in that region. When I returned to the place after one year of absence, people were curious to know about my study and about the country, New Zealand, where I was studying. Thus I responded to them instinctively and our relationship seemed to be renewed effortlessly. During the whole period of my data collection, I hired a room for my accommodation without any entertainment facilities and stayed there for the weekdays. I spend time outside with different people in the tea stalls, open fields and that keeps me in contact with the community and gave me the opportunity to be close to different groups of people and to listen to their opinions and understandings. It allowed me to develop a different kind of understanding to the context and opened my eyes and ears to things that I had not been aware of before during my three years of working there. As my intention was to explore the current local understandings and practices of parental engagement, I was open to receiving new ideas and concepts that could help my data collection rather than adhering strictly to a prepared plan.

Emergent design

In broad terms of methodological approach, my research design was an emergent one. Morgan (2008, p. 245) stated, “emergent design involves data collection and analysis procedures that can evolve over the course of a research project in response to what is learned in the earlier parts of the study”. According to Schwandt (2014) the nature of the planning and conducting process in the field study often referred as emergent design.

I entered the field to investigate parents’ and teachers’ understandings and practices of engagement and to study the complexities within the context that influence engagement.

My approach to the investigation was a grounded one, rather than based on any particular existing theory: I wanted what I would find in the field itself to shape the progress of the investigation and to shape my findings. I focused on remaining flexible in order to be open to whatever data I found. As the process of collecting data continued, I would find further issues or problems to investigate. This approach led me to the head teacher who is the subject of Chapter Eight. Schwandt (2014) mentioned that emergent research design allowed changing strategies, procedures in the field responding and attuning situations of the study. The inclusion of the head teacher added a new dimension to my study. Similarly, when I collated the themes that came out of my discussions with parents and teachers I became aware of trends within the themes which led me to re-consider the themes through a number of theoretical lenses, as described in Chapters Five and Six, that seemed relevant and that allowed me to gain deeper understanding of what was happening.

The process I went through is a reflection of the concept of what Denzin and Lincoln (2005) describe as *bricolage*. They emphasised the freedom of the researcher in the field to discover interpretive procedures which were not essential to decide in advance. Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 4) emphasised the value of capturing “what is available in the context, and what the researcher can do in that setting”. During the time of my fieldwork, as I interviewed the participants I spent time in the local context and closely observed the life of the people. The role of *bricoleur* allowed me to be introspective and reflective and to search for better ways of understanding the surface information I received. As Denzin and Lincoln (2005) pointed out being a *bricoleur* allows the researcher to look for and pick the previously missing things to fit into the research.

Among other kinds of bricoleur, the concept of interpretive bricoleur allows a researcher to produce a bricolage which brings different concepts together and be presented in a specific complex situation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). This concept allowed me to represent and interpret my findings in various ways, whereby I could get opportunities to build and reshape my concept and fill gaps that appeared. At the initial stages of analysing my findings I realised I was looking at and presenting dominant dialogues. Then I added an extra layer of analysis to look at the issues more deeply. The concept bricolage allowed me to look at my study through various lenses.

During the field work, I was always aware of giving preference to the participants and the context. Being flexible allowed me to include the school where the head teacher was

taking initiatives for engaging parents and creating space for them to being involved with their children's schooling, rather than accepting the lack of engagement. Being flexible, but also critically selective, allowed me seek out interpretative concepts that would further interrogate the surface findings of my study. Morgan (2008, p. 245) defined emergent research design as, "flexible approach to data collection and analysis allows for ongoing changes in the research design as a function of both what has been learned so far and the further goals of the study". Robson (2011) described emergent research in terms of a flexible research design which is useable in and appropriate for studies of the real world.

In the rural context of Bangladesh, the term parental engagement was a relatively new concept to many of the parent participants in this study. Keeping that in my mind I did not interrupt them when they shared their thinking and when they explained their understandings. Spending considerable time in the field allowed me to reach into the context and observe the real life conditions and practices. As well as hearing participants' explanations I could look at the contextual barriers that inhibited parental engagement, and so align the data I received with other realities in the context. Robson (2011) recommended the usefulness for the researcher of "having an open and enquiring mind, being a good listener" (p. 133). That approach prompted me to find what was relevant for my study and to seek gaps that appeared rather than being bound by a fixed plan for collecting data.

Interpretive Research Paradigm

The nature of parental engagement is not universally fixed. Each case is unique and grows out of traditions, enablers and restrictions within the particular context, and is shaped by the needs and attitudes of the school and the capacity of the parents. According to Borko, Liston, & Whitcomb (2007) social research involves an interpretative search for social meaning and needs to capture regional variation based on the description of the local settings and action. In this study, exploration of the engagement practices between teachers and parents required exploration not only of the schools' overall practices and teachers' expectations, but also of parents' own experiences of schooling and their socio-cultural positions, and of the geographical location and the cultural background within the region.

Engagement practices take place because of contextual needs which are derived from within the community. They depend on the parents' consciousness, capability and expectations. Engagement is also determined by the opportunities offered by the school and by the ways teachers offer space for parents' participation and contribution. Thus it was important to look at the daily lives of parents and teachers as well as their regular interactions in order to explore the engagement process in its real context. Their accounts of behaviour, their practices and the cultural and socio-economic conditions within their society needed to be considered.

A key focus of this study has been to examine the realities of parental engagement in practice within the rural setting in Bangladesh and to consider possibilities of greater engagement, either in the school or at home. This called for interpretation as well as recording of actions, statements and social conditions.

Although understanding engagement in context calls for an interpretive approach, my study was not built on any existing theory of engagement. It looked at the practices and the context from the bottom-up rather than from a top-down approach: it sought to highlight the actual realities of the context and participants' own perceptions and to develop interpretations that were consistent with the context and with participants' statements and actions. Only then did I look to find correspondences in existing theories.

Qualitative Approach

This study is qualitative in nature. Theorists (including Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Thanh & Thanh, 2015) point to the strong connection between an interpretive paradigm and qualitative research methodology that allows researchers to seek individuals' perceptions and understandings of their experiences. Qualitative research is a field of inquiry which is central to research conducted in education (Given, 2008) and it provides detailed description and analysis of human experiences (Marvasti, 2004). Lichtman (2013) explained, "Qualitative research has its purpose of a description and understanding of human phenomena, human interaction or human discourse" (P. 17). Because this study explores parents' and teachers' experiences of engagement an approach was needed that would give attention to details of experience and context and personal interpretations. The process of qualitative research allows a researcher to focus on exploring those experiences,

perceptions and interpretations. Merriam (2009, p.14) identified four characteristics as key to understanding the nature of qualitative research:

- the focus is on process, understanding, and meaning
- the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis
- the process is inductive and
- the product is richly descriptive.

There is little existing research about parent school relationships in the rural context of Bangladesh, beyond that which reports that engagement does not often occur. There is need, therefore, for a study that investigates the complexity of those relationships and those reports participants' experiences, expectations, hesitations and ideas about engagement. Given (2008) stated that qualitative research design suits the exploration and examination of the individual human elements of a particular topic. The context of Bangladesh is different from that of the western countries where much of the existing research about parental engagement has taken place. What happens in Bangladesh is therefore probably also different from what happens in western countries, although there may be some underlying similarities to be discovered. What happens in rural areas within Bangladesh is also different from what happens in urban centres. Therefore, there was need in this study for attention to contextualised and personal detail and for the rich description that are characteristic of a qualitative approach.

Mason (2002) explained that qualitative research allows exploring the weave of stakeholders' everyday activities, their understandings, experiences and imaginings. Given (2008) stated that by using qualitative approaches a researcher could explore new phenomena and capture individuals' thoughts, feelings or interpretations of meaning and process. Merriam (2009) highlighted that qualitative researchers are interested in understanding people's experiences in interpreting process, and what they attribute to their experiences in their areas.

The overall purposes of this study are to achieve an understanding of how parents and teachers make sense out of their practices on engagement, how they describe and interpret their experiences, and how they can proceed to develop more engagement with the aim of improving student learning. Patton (1987) stated that, through direct quotation and accurate description of any research situation, qualitative data provides depth and detailed information. The other advantages of a qualitative study are that researchers can expand

their understanding through different trends of communication, process information immediately; at the same time they can clarify and summarise material checking with respondents for the accuracy of interpretation (Merriam, 2009).

Case study

This research can also be described in terms of a case study, with the case being that of engagement practices within rural schools in Bangladesh. Within that overarching case study, I looked comprehensively at five secondary schools in one rural area, and then gave particular attention to the work of one head teacher. That intensive focus on the strategies of the particular head teacher can be seen in terms of an embedded case within the overall case study.

Yin (2012) distinguished between different kinds of case studies, identifying them as single, multiple, holistic and embedded. I find it most useful to consider my study as a single case with embedded components which could be seen as cases in their own right. Stake (2005) pointed out that case study is not a methodological choice but rather a choice of what is to be studied. Its characteristic quality is the “epistemological question [that drives it]: what can be learned about the single case?” (p. 443). Stake offered a very initial answer in his statement: “case study concentrates on experiential knowledge of the case and close attention to the influence of its social, political and other contexts” (p. 444). This case study, thus, concentrates on the understanding engagement in rural schools in Bangladesh through the reported experiences of the participating teachers and parents and through my own experiences in the field as well through exploration and analysis of the social, political, economic and cultural context.

In the first instance, investigation of the context came from participants, teachers and parents, from the schools, describing the contextual barriers that were blocking their engagement process and from the head teacher who took initiatives to overcome some of the contextual barriers and create space for engagement. I further investigated the context by using policy and other government documents, historic and contemporary accounts and my own experience, both lifelong and in the field.

Yin (2003, p. 13) described case study as an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not evident”. The context where this study was

conducted is unique and has an individuality of its own. The parents and teachers who participated in this study have collective as well as individual beliefs and lifestyle, and so it is important to give a thick description of the society where they are living in order to make overall sense of the engagement processes and possibilities within their real situation. Dawson (2010) described thick description as a process of focusing on context and interpreting social meaning in rich details while collecting data in the field.

In exploring and describing the existing situation of parent school engagement in the rural context of Bangladesh it is important to probe deeply into the context and for doing that a qualitative case study approach is well suited. Yin (2003) and Farquhar (2012) suggested that in case study research *how* and *why* questions are the most important to answer.

Merriam (2009) described case study as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon, which could be a programme, an institution, a person, a process or a social unit. The bounded phenomenon in this case is parental engagement in rural schooling.

Case study encourages the collation of rich and extensive detail (Njie & Asimiran, 2014), and that is what I sought in exploring stakeholders' current understandings of engagement and practices in secondary schools in Bangladesh. It provides the chance to explore phenomenon within the context using different types of data sources (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Farquhar (2012) explained that case study research is very much concerned with studying the phenomenon in its context. So findings from this study involve a description of how engagement happens within the context. Furthermore, a case study approach allows observation of stakeholders more generally in their regular practice within their context (Fidel, 1984) and in-depth exploration of stakeholders' collaboration (Morrell & Carroll, 2010). Yin (2003, p. 2), stated that "a case study approach directs investigators to the general and meaningful characteristics of real procedures". This study focused on parents' and teacher's current practices in engagement, how they can take initiatives for further engagement, especially for student learning improvement. The exploration provides a foundational example of stakeholders' engagement practices in real school situations in Bangladesh and identifies the perceptions, tensions, achievements and failures that underline implementation of what is called for by national policy. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison (2007) describe this kind of process as enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly through simple examples and descriptions.

My case and my approach to it

The schools I studied lie in a small geographical area which has been described in detail in the second chapter. I have an attachment to this region. I stayed in this area for approximately three years and worked with the school, teachers, and the community. During the period of my working there, I had opportunity to work not only with the schools, but also with some developmental projects and so I had some knowledge of the social structure and the schools' needs. In addition, I found similarities with the rural place where I born: similarities of culture, local accent of language, lifestyle, and socio-cultural similarities. As I described in Chapter Two, Bangladesh is dominated by rivers. This region is situated on the bank of a river, and is in many ways typical of the rural context in Bangladesh. The contextual realities I explored in this area are also widespread in other rural contexts in Bangladesh.

When I had developed a clear focus on my research question, I started thinking about the rural regions of Bangladesh, schools and teachers, and considered which region could be a suitable area for conducting my field work. Because of my previous association with the district, I thought there would be opportunity to carry out my research project with teachers I knew and their schools. In fact, there was an open welcome for me to do field work with them.

I therefore communicated with the teachers with whom I had worked before and who had offered me a fond farewell. That previous connection provided me with a relationship that could help me to work not only with the head teachers but also with the other teachers. When I reached the region to start my field work, I shared my study plan and what would be the teachers' roles.

I selected the schools to work with on the basis of convenient location, less internal problems and, most importantly, teachers' willingness to participate. Initially, I shared my purpose with nine schools, who were originally interested. Finally five schools stayed with my study and contributed their effort to my study. The main reasons that the other four schools could not participate in my research were matters of internal business. For example, one school was keen to be involved in my study, but they were busy with construction of their new school building.

Gaining access

It was possible for me to gain access to the schools directly through from my previous relationships with them, as there is a provision for school head teachers to allow such activities as long as they are not harmful to the school or hamper its regular activities. However, I asked for the assistance of the local government office in accessing schools, and consequently I looked to the Secondary Education Officer of that region as a *gatekeeper*. Farber (2006) described the gatekeeper as the person who allows a researcher access into the field, in my case to the schools and teachers. Given (2008) explained that in qualitative research gatekeepers are used to assist the researcher in gaining access and work as an entry point to a specific community or organisation. I deliberately chose to use the Secondary Education Officer as a gatekeeper because I wanted to position myself as a researcher, rather than as the administrator I had been previously.

Formal conversation with the head teachers started in the presence of the Secondary Education Officer. Her contribution in this role was to inform the head teachers that she fully supported my work and to ask for their co-operation with me. Before that I had met with her and described my study plan. Then she formally introduced me to the head teachers as a researcher and I briefed them about my project. Although I had an excellent rapport with the schools previously, my intention was to build up a new rapport with the schools as a researcher, and not simply continue with our previous relationship.

Initially, nine schools were interested in working with my study. However, due to some of the schools' internal pressures, such as an incomplete SMC, the appointment schedule of head teacher, and a running case against school authority, I finally started with five schools. I scheduled appointments with all the schools individually and visited the schools to receive written consent from the participants for being part of my study. My gatekeeper helped me to sort out these matters and to determine the schools which were most appropriate for my study. At each school I explained the purpose of my study and how I would describe the participants and the school in my thesis. I found participants more comfortable when I had shared the ethical obligations of a researcher and explained that I would give them pseudonyms rather than using their names. A few parents indicated that they would not mind if I did use their real name because they wanted to address the issues within the broader arena of their country, but I explained that using their names could betray the anonymity of others. I also assured the participants that the data would be stored

by me in a secure place and only I would have access to the raw data. I also created space for the participants of this study to ask me questions and to discuss the study individually with me, which make them clearer about its intentions and more curious to be part of the study.

Participants

The participants in this study are the key sources of data; I would like to recognise them as the heart of this study. They took me into different areas of their practices, experiences, context, and lived realities. They provided me with insider descriptions of their views on schooling and engagement in education which led the direction of my study.

I had certain categories marked for choosing participants, such as head teacher, teacher and parent. However, I did not have any further specific requirements; any parents or teachers could serve the purpose. I deliberately did not choose to use students as participants of this study. Students are, of course, at the centre of discussions about schooling and the teachers in particular often talked about students' needs and perspectives. However, I was primarily interested in how parents engaged with the school and how they saw their role in their children's education. In Chapter Seven I do explore some of the social problems that faced students, but I do this from an external perspective. Exploring students' perspectives is perhaps subject for a further study.

After a brief discussion of my study with the head teachers, they suggested parents who came from various socio-economic backgrounds within the community. The head teacher in a secondary school in Bangladesh holds the key responsibility of managing the school, and operating any activities in a school needs his consent. He plays the key role for any initiatives for organising programmes in the school, and especially for developing the engagement process with the parents.

In the participants' group, I added fourteen parents, eight teachers and four head teachers from four schools. I selected two parents, two teachers and the head teachers from each school for group discussion from the total participants, although I had individual interviews with them for clarifying and for gaining more details. The other participants I added for semi-structured interviews. One school become a focus of special attention after few days of data collection and later, because of the accumulation of data from Prerona School, I added five parents, three teachers, the head teacher and one community person

tor this study. I will later describe in detail the reason for giving special attention to this one school.

Description of the participants

The participants' names that I list below are those whose direct quotes I used in my report. In addition, during my data collection process I had opportunity to talk to various other people and these discussions helped me to enrich my ideas and gave me further thoughts for further planning.

Participants from four schools

Table 4.1: Parent participants from four schools:

Pseudonym	Socio- economic background	Gender
Tapash	Below middle income	Male
Monir	Below middle income	Male
Jahurul	Below middle income	Male
Torab	Below middle income	Male
Kohinor	Below middle income	Female
Maya	Below middle income	Female
Bilkis	Below middle income	Female
Lal Mia	Low income	Male
Julhash	Low income	Male
Sabur	Low income	Male
Selina	Low income	Female
Amzad	Low income	Male
Mojid	Low income	Male
Adil	Low income	Male
Belal	Low income	Male

Table 4.2: Head Teacher participants from four schools:

Pseudonym	Experience	Gender
Abul Hossain	27 Years	Male
Nasir Uddin	19 Years	Male
Didar Hossain	18 Years	Male
Tahmina	22 Years	Female

Table 4.3: Teacher participants from four schools:

Pseudonym	Experience	Gender
Emdad	07 Years	Male
Moshiur	09 Years	Male
Afsar	11 Years	Male
Edris	14 Years	Male
Minhaj	10 Years	Male
Shahana	16 Years	Female
Jabed	11 Years	Male
Maruf	15 Years	Male

Participants from Prerona School

Table 4.4: Parent Participants:

Pseudonym	Socio- economic background	Gender
Momin (SMC Member)	Below middle income	Male
Sattar	Low income	Male
Kamrul	Low in come	Male
Lavlu	Low income	Male
Saleha	Low income	Female

Table 4.5: Teacher Participants:

Pseudonym	Experience	Gender
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Iftekhar (Head Teacher)	15 Years	Male
Shabuj	10 Years	Male
Nadim	08 Years	Male
Farhad	14 Years	Male

Table 4.6: Community People:

Pseudonym	Position in the community	Gender
Tomiz Uddin	Social leader	Male
Moinul	Elderly Community People	Male

My position as researcher

When I entered the field I tried to put to a side the theory I had read and the policies I knew existed and focus on the real phenomenon as I encountered it. I tried to listen, without too much comparative analysis, to the participants' statements and explanations and to prioritise their understandings of their experiences and their context. I tried to remain flexible in order to allow the natural flow of participants' conversation.

Teachers in the study would address me as sir, as they were used to treat me in that way when I worked with them before starting my PhD journey. I do not interrupt their natural flow, as I realised that the way they were addressing me was not only from respect, it was mixed with friendship, love and a relationship which allowed me to work with them cordially. At the same time I was consciously positioning myself to create my new identity as a researcher rather than staying with the former identity. My intention was to develop a natural and spontaneous conversation between the teachers and me. However, this was not an entirely easy task, and prior to entering the field I worked with my supervisor to shift my own understandings from being an administrator who would monitor school implementation of policy to being a researcher who had no fixed expectations. I could easily remember my previous behaviour and way of talking with teachers, and realised that it had created some kind of a wall between me and them. Now I set out to intentionally break the wall and bring them close to me. I made a point of discussing several issues other than school matters and I shared my experience of study in New Zealand and that helped me to create a good rapport with them as a researcher. I become

confident that I was establishing a comfortable relationship when one head teacher began to talk about his daughter's coming marriage and asked me about my impressions of his future son-in-law.

Data collection process

I used a range of methods for collecting my data in the field, including group discussion, semi-structured interviews, observation, and review of school documents. My intention was to capture the overall situation of engagement within the reality of the context. These various data sources allowed me to explore from different viewpoints and to consolidate my data.

Group discussion

My first method of data collection involved group discussion. In this study, I used the term *group discussion* instead of *focus group discussion*. The two terms are sometimes used synonymously (Arthur, Waring, Coe & Hedges, 2012). I use *group discussion* because in this process I used the group to create opportunity for dialogue among participants rather than using one particular group as a focus for opinions on a given theme (Arthur, Waring, Coe & Hedges, 2012). Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namely (2005) described group discussion as an effective process of capturing the variety of opinions or views within a school context.

After finalising the participant list for my study, I visited the school to ask for their choice of a suitable time for group discussion. At the same time, I took the opportunity to meet informally with the teachers who would participate to make them prepared for the formal group discussion, and for what they would share with the parents who were to be participants. I gave space to the teachers so that they could arrange the date of the group interviews at times that suited them as I appreciated their busy schedule and did not want to impose on their time.

After receiving the date for group discussion from each school, I started group discussions formally according to the schedule they provided. The place for the discussion was the head teacher's office and all participants agreed to this location. I opened the discussion platform to the participants and asked them to share their understanding and experience of engagement. The duration of each group discussion was between fifty-three minutes to one hour and five minutes.

In this process, my role was as a facilitator who opening up the discussion and also kept the group on track. However, I never interrupted their natural flow of talking, but I did try and draw everyone in to participating and putting forward their thinking. Sometimes, I would ask participants for more clarification of some ideas.

I opened the floor for talking to everyone, and anyone could start who was comfortable to do so; my intention was not to be directive. Discussions tended to start with the teachers talking first about their current practices. Some parents would ask the teachers if they could share their opinion, as this was the first time for the parents to have met in such an environment. Initially, the participants, especially the parents, were very formal and were thinking about what to say. However, after some time all of them became more spontaneous in putting forward their experiences and thoughts. My initial question was related to current practices within their context and that made it easy for them to start.

The aim of group discussion was to create discussion about current practices of engagement and opinions, about whether engagement was important, and about what fostered or blocked engagement. Before moving to the next stage of the data collection process, I listened to the recordings I had made during the group discussion. I wanted to understand the participants' concerns to allow me to review the guidelines for semi-structured interviews that I had made before entering the field and to adapt them as needed. I rearranged my semi-structured interview questions accordingly.

Semi-structured interviews

The semi-structured interviews allowed me to follow up the group discussions with more individualised and in-depth dialogues. I came to each interview with a roughly structured outline of the areas I wanted to cover, but I also used open-ended questions (Mathers, Fox & Hunn, 1998) to prompt participants to talk about what they thought was important.

Mason (2004) described *semi-structured interview* as an overarching term in qualitative research, used to describe a range of different forms of interviewing. He explained that semi-structured interviews offer a flexible and interactive approach, which is appropriate to develop accounts of participants' own perspectives, perceptions, experiences, understandings and interactions. In this phase of my data collection, I selected the same teacher participants from the group discussion and added new further parents. Semi-

structured interviews offered me the flexibility to interview the participants and follow up responses they gave with further discussion so that I could develop a fuller understanding.

I started my initial interviews with the teachers in the schools, after getting individual times that would not interfere with their teaching time. Most of the interviews with the teachers took place on the school premises in a separate room. Some took place outside the school in places where teachers usually spent their free time. For the formal interviews I would visit the teachers, and the informal discussions would occur when I responded to their invitations to visit them or when they visited me at the upazila headquarter where I was staying.

As I explain in Chapter Seven the schools' academic calendar has frequent holidays. During the period of my data collection I faced various holidays, nearly one month for Ramadan and two Eid days, the biggest festivals in Bangladesh. During the holidays I visited parents to interview them, sometimes at their place of work, sometimes at their home and sometimes I would spend time with them in the tea stalls where they would normally spend their free time. I would usually make first contact with parents with the help of a teacher, and would get their permission through the teacher before I visited.

I spent more personal time with Iftekhar, the head teacher of Prerona School. As he is a head of a school he had a very busy schedule with school activities. We had an open discussion about his time constraints and he made a gentlemanly commitment to give his free time for formal and informal interviews. As a result, he would often call me and say something like: "Sir, tomorrow I have free time after 2 p.m., and you can visit my school, if you are available". After school hours, mostly in the evening, we would have a coffee time for discussion in a place called *Shamim*, tea stall. As our discussions developed Iftekhar became eager to show me his home visit activities, and I also had been hoping he would ask me to go with him. When I accompanied him on his home visits and his evening journeys through the tea stalls I had the opportunity to talk to many different people.

Interviewing participants in these ways allowed me and the participants to develop a friendly and fairly trustful researcher-participant relationship. As participants started thinking about themselves as part of my study they would offer me new spaces to briefly, but freely, discuss any issues.

Research journal

I maintained a research journal throughout my field work. My research journal, a pen, and a recorder were on my daily checklist when I left my accommodation. Maintaining a journal allowed me to record my immediate reflections and to return to them later for further critical analysis. My research journal allowed me to record some things in the field what I could not capture on tape but could only observe and feel.

My journal allowed me to capture conversations I had with parents working in the field or in their homes or that occurred during leisure time in a tea stall. Hogue (2012) explained that research journals provide an additional data set by which a researcher gets the opportunity to triangulate data. My research journal allowed me to capture my impressions of people and of the mood of discussion, as well as audio- recording the interview. I had the chance to spend time informally and chat with some participants and, with the permission of the person; I would note key aspects of these talks in my journal as soon as I returned home in the evening. My journal allowed me to value each moment in the field. The journal helped me to revisit moments in the field when I returned to the university and, as Janesick (1999) noted, it helped me at the time of analysing my data and during the writing process.

For example, I attended a parent's assembly organised by Iftekhar. After the meeting finished there was a time for refreshment and snacks. I noticed how Iftekhar was taking care of individual parents, especially the mothers who were a little shy about taking food. Iftekhar showed how well he knew the parents by addressing them in the traditional form that included their child's name, like Babuler *maa*, and making sure everyone was receiving food. I noted how his interactions reflected Iftekhar's good rapport with the parents. My research journal allowed me record the moment in writing and come back to it when analysing my data.

I also used my research journal to ask myself questions about what I observed and some of these questions prompted further analysis of my data when I returned from the field. For example, after I had transcribed a number of comments from teachers and even parents about parents being unconcerned about their children's education, I began to wonder whether these kinds of comments were self-reinforcing and were in fact not only helping to create a distance between parents and teachers but were also shaping parents' beliefs

about themselves. This led me to explore the concept of *social discourse* and the way expression of opinions and ideas might influence beliefs and actions.

My research journal also allowed me to flash back to the field while I analysed data. Each page of my research journal carried a wide range of thoughts as well as observations and these allowed me to recreate the field situation when I was back at my study desk.

Observation

As well as interviewing participants I observed practices in schools and conditions within the community. I visited different paddy fields to talk with the people, the bazaar to see them working, and houses to see the accommodation and study space for the students. I also visited schools before the examination time to observe parents negotiating for reduction of fees. I had a chance to attend two parents meetings which gave me the opportunity to observe how parents and teachers interacted and communicated. I was able to hear and see for myself the direct instruction that teachers were giving parents for their children's education.

When he took me to accompanying him in his home visit activities, Iftekhar offered me an opportunity to observe real life in the rural village. It was winter season when I visited different homes with Iftekhar. I travelled behind him on his motorbike in the dark and fog on a muddy road. Most of places we saw were very calm and quiet, except for the various tea stalls and these were noisy and full of people who were taking tea and watching television and talking loudly. Only Iftekhar and I started out for the home visits but after we had visited one house I found another teacher had joined us, carrying a torch light and with a *shal chador*¹ covering his body. He had been the acting head teacher before Iftekhar came into that role, and Iftekhar was addressing him as Babu². Then after a few more moments another person joined us, started walking with us and discussing various students and their family with Iftekhar. Initially I took him to be an assistant teacher of Prerona School, but after some time I realised he was a guardian and also a member of the SMC. During this home visit I observed Iftekhar's familiarity with the community and also saw the team work that Iftekhar had developed among his staff and SMC members.

¹ A thick warm shawl worn in winter

² Babu is used to address people who are Hindu in a way that shows brotherly respect.

Observation allowed me to introduce myself to the natural settings of the field and permitted me to collect direct information and link it with the participants' description and understandings (Creswell, 2012). The observation processes allowed me understand and capture the context directly (Patton, 2015). Observation allowed me to understand people's views, attitudes and feelings by observing and listening to them (Robson, 2011).

Use of documents

Flick (2009) stated that analysis of written documents allows examination of specific contextual material. I reviewed each school's documents regarding their description of engagement practices. I looked at schools' overall yearly plans, especially examining engagement related issues in the school activities. I reviewed the directorate manual for understanding policy regarding engagement, including different project components. I examined the implementation manual and also the national education policy. I also reviewed the documentation of practice at the school level to implement policies. Participants sometimes spontaneously showed me materials during individual interviews. That occurred particularly when I interviewed head teachers. For example, when he was discussing the issue of the Parent and Teacher Association, one head teacher showed me a regulation book for PTA activities and told me that he was just maintaining a record of compliance on paper but not in practice.

I drew on newspapers reports and editorials both in the field and through the internet when I returned from the field. I had found that newspaper stories were commenting on social issues almost every day and discussing various youth problems and the continuance of child marriage within society. I was closely attentive to problems my participants were describing and so I actively looked for news reports and media commentaries. Using newspaper documents gave me contextual information and allowed me to compare what my participants had told me to other accounts of social problems.

I also reviewed statistical reports about levels of literacy, incomes, distribution of population, educational access and retention and shifts in social practices. These allowed me to relate my participants' reports to the overall situation in the country and the rural context in particular.

Analysis

Analysis of data began in the field. Each group discussion, interview and informal observation made me think about the new ideas and opinions that were being expressed and consider how they related to what had come up previously. Gaps and apparent contradictions served as prompts for further discussions. They also served as prompts for further reading and thinking after I left the field. Earlier I talked about the role of *bricoleur*. The informal and on-going analysis that I carried out in the field directed me to look for more information and to pick up on opportunities that offered something different and new.

I recorded all the interviews, and after each I would listen to the recording carefully to understand the meaning of participants' words, to identify initial themes that seemed to be emerging from their discussion, and to note apparent contradictions and gaps. The initial themes allowed me to make my next plan and guided me to next stages for data collection. This process provoked new understandings of the realities participants faced in the context, and guided me to areas that I needed to explore in more detail in the next stages of my data collection. I continued to collect data until I considered I had filled the gaps I had identified and I had enough material to develop the detailed description that I required for answering my research questions.

After completing the data collection process, I repeatedly listened to all my recordings and read all my notes and journal reflections to build up a comprehensive picture of their scope and of recurring themes. I translated key passages from Bangla to English. Then I developed a map of the themes that arose and of the differences and commonalities between teachers' perceptions and parent's perceptions. My first layer of analysis involved grouping data in participants' statements according to surface content. The dominant themes that emerged were the parents' disinterest and teachers' needs for parental support. In addition a further cluster of themes involved the invitation process to meetings where teachers explained the consistency of the process and parents complained that invitations did not reach them. At this stage the themes matched with those in existing Bangladesh literature and in popular discussions that I frequently heard, not only in the field but more widely in Bangladesh.

I therefore, felt the need to probe further- this led me to search for deconstructive tools to use in my analysis. One of the useful concepts I found was that of the power of social discourses. I asked how the participants' perceptions matched dominant discourses in Bangladesh society. The identification of discourse patterns led me to an examination of underlying social, economic and cultural factors impacting on parental roles which then led me to an exploration of the forms of cultural capital, power and disempowerment in the community that blocked the engagement process.

In particular the themes of illiteracy, poverty, and first-generation-education emerged as significant. These themes led me to explore the extent to which the concept of cultural capital could be used in interpreting the gap between parents and teachers. However, I found there were other themes that arose, such as family relationship and traditional values that I realised might not fit readily into a theorisation based on cultural capital. Therefore, I decided to offer the possibility for further interpretive exploration in term of social and cultural capital, but I was also careful to present the issues in their own right.

There was a cluster of themes, raised by both parents and teachers that talked about the problems challenging young people in the society. I decided to present these together in a separate report of the issues, in addition to educational ones, that showed the need for engagement between parents and teachers.

In dealing with the data I gained through interviews and observation with the head teacher, Iftekhar, I drew on principles of appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider, 1986; Hammond 2013) in order to identify the aspects of his initiatives that made a difference. Appreciative inquiry approaches focus less on analysis of problems and critiques of actions than the identification of the "motivating moments of success" (Hammond, 2013, p. 02) that participants recall. I took this approach because previous material in the study had already highlighted a comprehensive range of problems. On the other hand interviews with Iftekhar offered valuable example of the kinds of initiatives that could be taken for change.

I drew on peer critique within our research lab to help me pose further questions about my data that I wanted to answer and to challenge my existing assumptions. I further tested my identification of themes and my tentative conclusions in two international conference presentations.

Decisions about presentation

Creswell (2012) stated that a qualitative research report could be presented in an alternative way. However, Patton (2015) reminded researchers to think about the audience and how they would perceive the presentation. That persuaded me to describe the context in which the parental engagement, or disengagement, that I studied took place and in which the comments made by participants were made. This resulted in a chapter that carries a description of selected issues within the rural community that I think readers may not already know about and which will help them understand the material presented in the four chapters that report my data.

In presenting participants' statements I sought to initially retain the surface quality of what they said as these were the thoughts and understandings that they shared with me. I sought to be non-judgmental in my presentation of their voices. However, I also realised that it was important to look beneath the surface and examine both the underlying social and economic realities and ways that different groups, such as parents and teachers, constructed their views about each other and their own practice. In reporting I drew on not only my interviews, but also my observations and my reflections both in the field and after I left. As I continued to explore and question the material from the field I turned to various theories that I thought might further illuminate it. I have presented my discussion of these at the end of each chapter in order to not interfere with the presentation of the participants' own voices.

In the interviews, and even more in my field journal, discussion arose about ways to fix some of the problems that were described and ways to improve communication between teachers and parents. Because these were aspirational rather than reports of what had already happened I decided to reserve these for a separate section and that became the second half of Chapter Seven. Finally, because the material that arose from my discussions with Iftekhar was so different from the other material that I found, I decided to report his activities in a separate chapter.

Trustworthiness

Because a qualitative case study produces findings that are particular to that case, validity of the findings needs to be considered in terms of their trustworthiness and rigour.

One source of their trustworthiness is my own professional experience in the area of community engagement in education. I entered the field for collecting data with previous professional understanding of parental engagement in the rural context in Bangladesh. Before starting my PhD journey, I had been involved in various school activities, and I had also been assigned to implement various government policies at school level and to monitor schools' implementation processes. My previous professional experience gave me some grounded knowledge of the policy relating to parental engagement and I supplemented this by extensive reading in the field. However, I came to realise that this could also give me some biases and some unconscious assumptions. Before entering the field, my supervisor and I repeatedly discussed these biases and my supervisor provoked me into numerous role plays to make me be aware of the shift from administrative thinker to researcher. These equipped me with awareness that helped to look at the practices in the field critically.

A further measure of trustworthiness is the degree of trust and consequent openness that accompanied my participants' sharing of opinions. As explained above, both teachers and parents grew in confidence in speaking their minds in discussions and interviews. An example of this is the way many of them invited me into their homes and particularly the way the head teacher of Prerona School invited me to accompany him in his visits around the district.

Another measure is the cross-checking of interpretations. At the end of every interview, I usually summarised the key concepts that participants expressed and that I shared with them so that they easily say if they wanted to make corrections. I have been able to return key sections of my account of his practices to the head teacher of Prerona School for his feedback and to fill in gaps where I needed more information. Returning material to the other participants after I had left the field has not been practicable as many of the parents are not literate and even though the teachers and some parents are literate, the culture is a predominantly oral one and they will not read written material, even if they do manage to access what I send them through an internet system that has poor connectivity. However, I plan to present my findings locally when I return to Bangladesh. While I was in the field I openly discussed my emergent understandings with participants in tea stalls and other informal spaces. I had a good rapport with teachers from a number of schools within the area that were not part of my study. I would spend my free time with various teachers and

they often talk about schooling issues, including parental involvement. That allowed me to cross check what I was getting from the participants.

Still another measure is the availability of critique. During the period of my data collection and analysis, I had the opportunity to present my emergent findings in my research lab and in international conferences in front of scholars from various countries, and even from Bangladesh. The other members of my lab would question me extensively and force me to give evidence for my assumptions. They would also provoke me with different, and sometimes useful, interpretations of my data. My exploration of dominant social discourses was a response to one such provocation. Questions at conferences also forced me to examine my data and findings critically. One particularly challenging, and useful, question was how I would envisage engaging those parents who were themselves illiterate in their children's learning. I have one article published in an international journal (Hasnat, 2016) and the process of peer review also promoted my criticality, as has the constructive but critical feedback to other journal articles that I have submitted.

Language and translation

The interviews were conducted in Bangla as participants' mother language is Bangla. Then I translated all the Bangla statements into English with careful consideration of keeping the core meaning of what participants said.

I have been very aware of the need to not lose anything in translation, although it has been a big challenge for me to translate my data from Bangla to English. I am a second language speaker of English and a novice translator. In particular, I laboured to keep the real meaning that participants expressed in their mother tongue. I also wanted to keep the flavour of their speech. In Bangla it was easy to see the differences in the ways parents and teachers spoke, and I could feel the rurality of parents' speech when I had transcribed it in Bangla, but it was a challenge for me to keep that feeling when I translated into English. I spend time trying to maintain the rural flavour in English. I checked segments of my translations with other Bangladesh doctoral students.

In my presentation, I have used a few Bangla words and expressions, particularly to record participants' use of Bangla proverbs. Some of the Bangla proverbs do not translate directly into the English language and so I sought to capture the underlying meaning rather than giving a literal translation. I used Bangla terms sometimes to describe events, objects or

concepts that are specific to the rural context I studied, and in those cases I offered a translation in the text or in a footnote.

I gave participants pseudonyms. I would like to share the reason for choosing the name Iftekhar for the head teacher who is taking initiatives for change. For his pseudonym, I used the name of someone who was a head teacher when I was a student at the secondary education level. I could recognise his dynamic leadership for school change and I found the same quality in this head teacher. Besides that, I used only one school pseudonym in my study: *Prerona*. The word *prerona* is a Bangla term which carries the meaning of *inspiration* or *motivation*.

Ethical considerations

This project was granted approval from the Educational Human Ethics Committee (ERHEC) of the University of Canterbury. I strictly followed the ethical guidelines of the ethics committee.

Data collection process started with negotiating access to the head teachers, parents, and other teachers. I discussed the purpose and significance of my study with all participants. Information and consent forms were provided to all participants. I provided all written forms in Bangla with a verbal explanation to ensure all participants were clear about the purpose of study, our activities and their role. Participants were assured about their anonymity and the confidentiality of raw data. I made it very clear to all participants that their participation in the study was completely voluntary, and that they had the right to withdraw from this study at any time. Participants were assured that the collected data would be used only for the purpose this thesis and related publications and not for any official evaluation. I started my data collection after getting participants' signed consent.

My ethical obligations also include respect for the cultural values of the community. I was aware of addressing participants from different level of the society. As part of my data collection I dealt with teachers who hold a respected position in the society and with some parents who came from low socio-economic backgrounds. I was aware that in that situation I was seen in different roles, and I found that I had to take different roles. Some of the parents I talked with had no previous experience of being asked about, thinking about or talking about the kinds of issues I raised. They also indicated that they assumed that their illiteracy made them inferior, as I discuss in Chapter Six. As a researcher, as well

as a person, it was my ethical responsibility to acknowledge the value and importance of their perceptions and opinions, and to respect their voices. So too with the teachers. Although some of my analyses were critical of the situation and practices that made parental engagement difficult I sought to embed my critiques in an acknowledgement of historic and contextual causes rather than critiquing any individual.

As I spent time in the field with the participants and as I sat with their accounts at my study desk I came to realise that, because of their openness to me and the valuable time and effort they shared, the participants also in some way own my study. I am aware it is my responsibility to respect their voices and also to use what they shared to make a contribution to better processes for including parents in their children's education.

Chapter Five: Discourses of Engagement

I am illiterate, they are literate, and that is why I cannot say anything to them.

(Parent)

When we invite parents, not only do they not come, they do not even share why they are not coming. (Teacher)

This chapter reports and examines some of the prevalent discourses about parental engagement in education in rural Bangladesh. It briefly describes the administrative and developmental context in which engagement is expected and the broad theoretical concepts that underpin that expectation. It then reports my own entry into the field and the initial dialogues I had with teachers and parents. I report what I was told about the processes of their interactions, the purpose behind planned involvement, initiatives for involvement, the success of their engagement, barriers to their engagement and initiatives that can be taken by them for their further involvement. Then I examine the information I was given in terms of *discourse*, and the way discourses both convey and shape understandings and attitudes. Finally I pose a number of critical questions that will be further examined in Chapter Six.

As briefly discussed in Chapter Two, national education policy in Bangladesh (GoB, 2010) emphasises the importance of parental engagement in schooling. The recent project, Secondary Education Sector and Access Enhancement Project (SEQAEP) provides a small budget to fund Parent Teacher Association (PTA) meetings reiterates the value of communication between school and parents and is beginning to develop a monitoring process of whether PTAs are carrying out their mandated responsibilities. In addition, as is also explained in Chapter Two, the existence of School Management Committees is an acknowledgment of the important role community has played in building schools and now plays in managing schools. On the other hand published research (Toaha, 2015; Manzoor, 2013; Hamid, Sussex & Khan, 2009; Nath, 2007) suggests that there is in fact very little engagement of parents in their children's schooling beyond the activities parents undertake to provide their children with coaching for examination success, and that in rural districts in particular parents seldom visit school except for the negotiation of fees. My research project set out to explore what was really happening.

The intentions of government policy clearly align with dominant themes in international literature about parental engagement. For example Hornby (2000), Bryan (2005), Larocque et al. (2011) repeatedly speaks of the need for teacher and parental collaboration, and the need to treat both parties as the heart of a school. Ideally, it seems, students perform at the front of achieving educational outcomes and teachers and parents play supporting roles in collaboration with each other. So, how parents and teachers play their respective supportive roles is important. The outcomes of students' performance, as well as the school's performance, seem to depend on the part played by teachers and parents. Therefore, some kind of mutual understanding between teachers and parents and a process of communicating with each other and working together are essential in this regard. Moreover, if a school is to be instrumental, as envisaged by Saldana (2013), in building a society of intellectual citizen who can take well-educated roles in the community, schools' success requires the participation of all stakeholders in the school.

The rural area I investigated is situated approximately in 200 km from the capital city, Dhaka, Bangladesh, and while the geographical distance is not great, the rural area feels like a different world, as I described in Chapter Two. I came into the field wanting to examine teachers' perceptions of parental engagement and of the impact of engagement on students and the operations of the school. To enter field I negotiated with the head teachers from about a dozen schools. I shared information about my research. In the first discussion I had with each of them I sought to hear their concerns. Most of the head teacher's initial comments were statements like: *"Parents are not coming"*.

In many cases when I first talked with teachers who might participate, the first conversation started with these types of frustrated comments and some teachers showed they were upset by the lack of involvement. It appeared that teachers from this area were not getting any success in involving parents with the school. In the sections that follow I report how teachers talked about the lack of engagement by parents, and how they described their initiatives in inviting them to school. I will also report how parents spoke of the roles they might be comfortable to take in regard to the school.

Teachers' expectations from engagement with parents

The majority of the teachers I talked with initially emphasised the positive impact of communication between parents and teachers. For example, Shahana, an assistant teacher,

said, “In our school, a small number of parents are communicating with us and, because of that, their children cannot avoid their study”.

Similarly, Emdad, another assistant teacher, agreed about the importance of communication and acknowledged that, after showing a mother her son’s lack of progress, “her son is now improving day by day, only because of her communication”.

The teachers participating in this study generally reported beliefs that engagement between home and parents has a positive impact on children’s education. Several teachers shared their experience of a limited number of cases where parents were communicating with them and reported that this had a positive impact on students’ learning. Many teachers expressed concern about the problems they are facing because of what they saw as a lack of concern by parents about their children’s education. Emdad recounted his experience:

Students of those families in which parents are communicating with the school to know about their children’s performance and providing their care at home are doing well and changing their attitude to learning. However, the numbers of such parents are microscopic; you can count them on your fingers

He added that he believed that communication between teachers and parents provided a chance for both teachers and parents to change their understandings and attitudes.

I followed my first discussions with teachers with group discussion involving parents as well as teachers. In these teachers and some parents spontaneously expressed their understanding of how a process of engagement could improve the current learning situations of the students. In these group discussions in various schools, the majority of participants from both parents and teachers expressed their beliefs that, if parents regularly communicated with the teachers about their children, the teachers’ sense of responsibility would improve. In a similar way participants, both teachers and parents, expressed the hope that when teachers would realise the increase of parental care and see the increase of eagerness from the parents about their children’s progress then teachers themselves would be more caring about individual students’ progress. The increase of parental communication would create an effort or pressure on teachers to update themselves about the progress and difficulties those particular students whose parents were showing concern and they would consequently conduct their class with careful attention to those students’ needs. Similarly, an overall opinion emerged that when teachers would communicate with

parents, then parents would not have any other options but to pay attention to their children's progress and learning needs. Teachers repeatedly expressed their belief that if parents would communicate with them regularly, then positive things could happen.

Both parents and teachers suggested that communication was the key process of engagement. In the course of discussions it was suggested that engagement could take place in different ways, but it needed to be seen in the context of Bangladeshi rural settings. Initial conversations stressed the belief that communication between parents and teachers could play a major role in improving students' learning processes. These conversations reflected that both groups compressed their understanding of the term engagement to that of developing a process of communication. It became apparent that within their context, they had a limited practice of communication between them, and so they drew on their imaginations to express how communication could make a difference to their current practices. That imagination, however, seemed to be based on their limited contextual practices.

Ways of communication

Modes of communication were considered an important consideration by both parents and teachers. In the group discussions, two types of communication were considered by the participants: one to one between parent and teacher focusing on individual student matters and school-based where all teachers and parents would come together on a day focusing on general discussion of school activities.

Individual teachers talked about what they expected from communication with individual parents and what matters they wanted to contact the parents about directly. For example, Moshiur, an assistant teacher, expressed his opinion: "When we find any problem with any student's irregularity with attendance in the class or about students' performance then we need to make contact with the parents."

Moshiur added his opinion that if a teacher shares the weakness of any student with their parents and can advise the parents of what to do with the child in order to better progress in education, then parents can follow the teacher's direction and so play their role. Like several other teachers I spoke with, Moshiur expressed his assumption that when parents would know that teachers care about their children's education then parents would be encouraged to themselves take more care of their children's learning.

It was repeatedly suggested that individual teachers can play a role to communicate with parents individually. As Emdad, an assistant teacher, said:

In my class, I can realise who is performing well or who is irregular. I can communicate with those students individually, from my interest. Some teachers may think it will be tough to notice each individual, but I know in my class that all students who are not regular or are not performing well at a time. If I can point out those students, only those who are irregular and are not performing well, then I can discuss the problem with the student first. If it does not work then I can make contact with his parents individually.

Individual and co-ordinated communication could take place from both teachers and parents' initiatives. In co-ordinated school-based processes, it was suggested, the school could invite all parents into the school so that teachers could discuss pre-selected school issues with the parents, focussing on the improvement of the students' progress, and then both parents and teachers could communicate individually. Teachers stated that they could then communicate with the parents about individual students' problems. Iftekhar, a head teacher, added a concept which was a little different from that of other participants; he suggested that teachers should communicate with the parents not only for problem matters but also for positive matters about the students.

Participants from this study discussed communication as a simple means of improving their engagement process, and expressed the expectation that it could change existing practice in various ways. They discussed in some detail how communication could make a difference and talked about areas where change might take place. Teachers reported that they regularly invite parents to the school once in a year on result announcement day. Teachers also acknowledged that they mostly talked about parents' lack of awareness of students' progress and that they would try to get parents to take more responsibility. They admitted that this might lead to some mistrust among them. I take up that theme later in this chapter and in the following one, and examine how it affects parents' willingness to visit the school. Parents, on the other hand, acknowledged that they communicate with the teachers for reducing fees and this too is described further later in this chapter.

Increasing consciousness

In discussions teachers emphasised the importance of parental consciousness about what their children are doing, focusing on their school performance and their activities at home. Agreeing with the teachers' opinions parents stated that they realised the importance of communication with the teachers and how it could create a positive impact on their children's education. They acknowledged that, as parents, they should at least know about their children's performance at school and in the examination. However, parents stated that they have limited information in this regard. Communication could, therefore, play a vital role to update them. Tapash, a parent, expressed his opinion:

In some point teachers know more about my son than me. It could be because of the bustle in my life for earning money and food for my family. Communication will make me updated about my son's performance, and I will get information about any gap in my son's learning. Then I will get a chance to fill up the gap by discussing it with his teachers. Without communicating with the teachers, it would not be possible to improve.

In these discussions teachers and parents emphasised the importance of sharing information about the performance of their children in the school. By sharing information parents would be updated about their children's learning, and they could therefore be conscious about their children's learning. Making parents conscious, it was said, was important to guide students' learning and their successful schooling.

Reducing the gap

In our discussions a gap was acknowledged to exist between teachers and parents and because of the gap, it was felt, parents are not showing concern about their children's schooling. The fact that they hardly met each other was identified as a reason for the gap. In the existing situation they could not share ideas between them about any educational matters. For that reason they realised the importance of discussion. The participant's in my groups all expressed the belief that discussion could play an active role by which both parents and teachers would become closer to each other and so fill the existing gap. Hanif, an assistant teacher, described communication as one of the easiest ways to create a situation where teachers can discuss their current situation with the parents and work for a possible further solution. Like Hanif, other teachers stated their belief that when the

communication process goes smoothly, then the students' problems will change, so making for a meaningful engagement. Hanif shared his belief in this way:

When parents would communicate with us and share about their children's activities, then student's weakness will come forward from our conversation. Then parents can take further initiatives for recovering the weakness of their children. In this case, parents and teachers can communicate with each other individually according to their convenient time.

Sharing good and bad

The need to change their ways of thinking about each other also emerged as a theme in the interviews. Edris, an assistant teacher, described the school as a family and teachers, parents and students as the members of that family. With a voice that carried a note of frustration, Edris expressed his opinion:

In our family when we face any problem or any problem arises then we discuss with each other for solving that problem, sharing with others. When we cannot sit together for sharing any problem, then that does not carry any good result for that family. In the same way, if we can consider school as a family and consider every stakeholder as the members of this family, then we need to work together for any problems or making any functions successful.

Like Edris other teachers and parents emphasised the importance of sharing everything between them, whether bad or good. Everyone, it was said, should be responsible for overcoming the problematic issues. The belief was generally expressed that it would be better for all if they could sit together for solving any issue as much as possible. Communication and discussion could play a vital role to improve the relationship between parents and teachers. It would reduce the gap between them and if they could work together with proper planning for school development, it was considered that everything would be easier. There seemed to be agreement about a need to continue the effort to make parents aware of the importance of the invitation to attend school meetings.

Working together on students' behaviour

When I talked with teachers separately they also described the importance of communication with the parents for students' learning and general well-being. Teachers shared the concern that they are dealing with teenagers and that teenagers have some

attitudes which are unique to their age group and there is a need to handle them carefully. They acknowledged that teenagers need proper guidance to lead them in a purposeful way. The teachers argued that they themselves could not guide them adequately; that needed parental time, guidance and role modelling of good behaviour. Parental engagement, it was said, could have a positive impact on their children's education as well as their overall behaviour. However, teachers voiced their opinion that parents from this area had little concern about this issue. They reported that students from this area were not getting proper food and other support when they needed it, and when they did not receive a sense of how important they were to their parents they felt helpless which is not suitable for any children's growing up. Communication with the parents could make them understand the importance of the students' age and what their role and behaviour towards their children could be. Emdad said:

Most of the students are teenagers; we need to understand their attitude, willingness and mind very carefully. There is a chance of negative impact on their mind, if we continue a regime in a severe way. Soft behaviour and friendly behaviour with them is important to make them clear about their education.

Shahana shared her understanding that students of this age students felt they had a right to show their disobedience and that different things would provoke them to do, and sometimes this would lead them to become involved in negative activities. Several teachers talked about students' minds as being very sensitive and of the need for both teachers and parents to pay attention to their minds and to deal with them in an appropriate way so that they could continue their life in a positive way. Parental guidance and concern were considered essential in this regard, but teachers seemed to be sure from their experience that students are not getting the best environment and support from their parents. So teachers emphasised the need communicate with parents. Shahana added:

Children's mind is like clay, so we will need to handle them carefully. However, students are not getting that support from their parents. Fathers are busy with their job, so I think those children whose mother would be more affectionate will have a chance to do better.

Teachers felt that when parents were not practising their responsibilities appropriately, it unfortunately created problems related to students' schooling. Latif, an assistant teacher, stated that students' irregularity of attendance was one of the biggest issues of this area

and that such irregularity indicated a parental lack of care and lack of understanding of the importance of education to their children's future. Teacher emphasised that it affected students' motivation and progress when they were absent for a long time. They discussed communication with parents and how to work with them for improving students' regularity of attendance. They further stated that sometimes parents would take their children with them to work during school hours, which would lead to irregular attendance. Teachers considered that if, on this issue particularly, both parents and teachers could collaborate, and then parents could be convinced not to take their children into any other activities except school. At the same time, teachers acknowledged that they needed to communicate with the parents when any student was not attending school activities for a long time. Latif added:

If any student does not come to the school on a regular basis, as a teacher, whenever I notice, then I will need to find out the reason for why they are not coming. I can do that by communicating with the parents, and it could be by visiting their home or over the phone. If parents support me and we work together on it, then it would be much easier, and I hope within a very short time we will get a positive result and regularity will increase. For that everyone, both parents and teachers need to be cordial about everyone's position.

Another problem that teachers talked about was that some students were not attending in the classroom for the whole day. They described how students would leave their house at the time school began to show that they were going to school, and after that they would go to play somewhere or watch TV in a street side shop. After 4 p.m. when school finished they would return home as if they are returning from school. Shahana said:

Students' soft mind always attracts them to become involved in different activities except attending schooling. Parental care and support are important in this regard. Parents need to know about their children's activities, at least about how, where and with whom they are spending their time. However, this awareness is absent in this context.

Latif said that another common problem was that students were not finishing their whole day in the school. There was a common tendency among students to disappear after few classes. Usually they would escape from school early and return home after the end of

school hour. They would normally spend time with their friends in other places; sometimes they would become involved in various immoral activities. He explained:

We are experiencing a problem every day: which is when a student attends in the classroom; they run away after a few classes. It happens mostly after the tiffin break. After the tiffin break, we find very few students in the classroom. There is a huge chance for the students to involve themselves in different illegal activities in this time.

Blame game

It emerged during group discussions that neither parents nor teachers were happy with the current degree of engagement, and that both teachers and parents were blaming one another, with neither was willing to take responsibility. Teachers seemed to expect that if parents communicated with the teachers, then students would not find the courage to be absent for the school activities or disappear after a few classes. In the same way, those parents who were aware of some of the problems argued that teachers were not taking the issue seriously and were not communicating with them, and so parents were not being informed when their children were absent. Kohinor, a parent, claimed:

The problem of absenteeism and practices of running away after a few classes continues without our knowing about it; if the teacher would share with us, then we could play our role in this regard.

The participants stressed the importance of everyone's awareness of the problems and added that, besides teachers and parents, it was important for community people to play a responsible role, so that students would not get a chance to play anywhere outside of school in school hours.

Several teachers expressed their disappointment with the lack of parental support. They considered that currently they are not getting any support from parents, and parents are not showing any interest in their children's education. On the contrary, many teachers felt that parents harboured negative attitudes rather than having a helpful and co-operative attitude towards teachers.

Like Latif, other teachers related that any initiatives for resolving students' irregularity and escaping from the school were those teachers had taken. Teachers reported that in order to

stop such student misbehaviour they would often impose a penalty system on the student, so that a fine would be charged if someone escaped from school or attended irregularly but they acknowledged that this practice was not regular. It appeared that fining was not successful in stopping absenteeism. Torab, a parent, argued that there might be more positive approaches than a penalty system:

The school authority charges a penalty many times and provides punishment for not coming to school and for escaping school. However, somehow students manage these fines; they may ask for tiffin money from parents. Those who fail to handle the fine receive punishment from the teachers. But if the teachers would contact with the parents rather than only impose a penalty it would be better.

Many teachers acknowledged that imposing a penalty was only a temporary solution although some students did come more regularly after this initiative had been taken. For a long-term solution, they agreed, they needed to cooperate with the parents, and parents in their turn should realise and follow through on their responsibilities.

Parents also talked about this problem, but they maintained that they had noticed that teachers did not treat the issue with high attention or importance. Torab did not want to consider this responsibility to rest with parents. He stated:

I send my children to attend school. If they do not go to school and go to other places to play then it would not be possible for me to know about it. The teacher can inform us. If teacher informs us, then we could be conscious and make our children aware that we are concerned about them.

It was argued that a process of contacting the other party in a timely manner could play a role in reducing the problems, and also in blaming one another. The communication gap the two parties seemed to create the space for blame. It appeared that neither teachers nor parents wanted to assume responsibility and both tried to pass their responsibilities to the other. The participants in group discussions in this study expressed hope that communication could play a strong role to fill the vacuum between teachers and parents.

An emergent idealism

Discussion in itself can be a way of provoking possible change. As my initial discussions with the participants developed they began to talk about ways of making change in their

current practices. The communication between teachers and parents that was emerging from the group discussions was being identified as a primary way to enhance the engagement process that up to now had been limited. Both groups of participants began to examine their understanding of possible engagement processes and particularly of how communication could play a major role. Much of their discussion was based on imagination. At the time I left the field, there was no visible impact on the engagement process, but there may be an impact in future if the participants keep their imagination working in such way. It may influence them when they make their future plans. I reflected that imagination is the first step of changing practice. I recalled Albert Einstein saying, *Imagination is more important than knowledge*, and reflected that it meant that imagination could indicate possibilities that we could later find the means to make happen if we thought they were worthwhile. In their imagination, the participants in my interview groups imagined communication among one another and expressed how communication could play a strong influence. In their imagination, they visualised their initiatives for change and how those could improve their students' performance. First, however, I will describe what, based on the participants' comments and my own observations, and emerged as current practice.

Current practices of parental participation in school activities

It is evident from discussion with the participants that most parents would hardly ever visit the school without receiving an invitation of some kind from the teachers. In this rural context it was very rare for parents to visit the school to get information about their children's performance. The practice has not yet developed in the rural settings in Bangladesh that parents are visiting the school, meeting with the teachers, seeking advice for solving problems and discussing their children's problems or for improving the situation. On the other hand, it is normal that teachers do invite parents to various school programmes and only a small number of parents are responding to the invitations and attending those programmes, even though the schools' initiatives in holding such programmes are taken as a result of government orders.

Inviting parents to the school activities and communication with the parents has not been a regular practice in the rural context of Bangladesh. There are a few, very limited occasions for invitations, but teachers complained that they have limited success in involving parents in school programmes. Emdad said:

Parental invitation to the school is not a regular practice, but whenever we invite parents to the school, parents do not attend on that day. Parents do not consider the importance of our school invitation compared to their work.

He continued:

In the recent past, we celebrated our national programme by simply participating at the headquarters of our upazila, where we would send selected students to perform. At that time our school remained closed, and it was not compulsory for the teachers and the other students to attend, and teachers and students would observe the festival according to their interest. The physical education teacher organised and trained those selected students to participate. It was like part programme of our school and not a whole school programme.

The scenario has changed now. The government is emphasising the celebration of national programmes within the school programme. The school should be open, and teachers' and students' attendance is mandatory now. Nowadays we are celebrating our national days in a splendid way.

Normally we invite parents to two different types of functions: one to the various school functions and another is to the result announcement time. The various school functions to which we invite parents are the annual sports time, various national days, the farewell programme and the *milad mahfil* [farewell with religious function] for SSC examinees and after the half yearly and final exam when we announce the results. By inviting them to school functions, we try to keep in touch with the parents, and at the result time, we seek to inform them about the performance of their children.

Edris, an assistant teacher, explained:

We have government orders to celebrate our national days with prestige including community people. As well as various national programmes, annual sports programmes, farewell ceremony for SSC candidates and others programmes are organised by school. In these types of programmes we expect spontaneous participation of the parents and the local people.

I was told that during the school programmes, school authorities would decorate the school yard, based on their financial capacity. These types of programmes would usually be formal, where the school would invite highly placed local politicians and government officials. The programme would focus on the inviting guests and seek to make them happy. The school authority would offer various types of gift items to the prestigious guests, and teachers would focus on them and be mostly busy around them. These school programmes would be open programmes for everyone to attend, parents as well as community people. However, the politicians and the local leaders would have limited concern about parental expectations, and they would mostly talk about political issues and their government's success. These types of celebrations in the school would provide a platform for the local politicians and teachers would take the opportunity to build a rapport with these leaders. Sometimes parents would be invited by the school through their children. Besides these programmes schools would take initiatives to bring parents to the school once in a year, where teachers would focus on parents on that day. Sometimes they would focus on mothers, as there is a new movement of inviting mothers to schools. In these programmes teachers would invite the politicians, local leaders and sometimes officials to speak to parents. However, it was widely reported that parents seemed to place little importance on attendance in these programmes.

Concern about lack of response from the parents

Teachers reported that they usually invite parents to attend various national programmes, expecting their active participation and contribution of ideas. Teachers considered this as one way of connecting parents with the school. In the invitation process, they would invite parents by invitation letter, and they would send those invitation letters through the students. They also reported that whenever they would meet any parents in any place they would invite them verbally. However, they complained that their expectations were never fulfilled because of the low participation by parents. It seemed to the teachers that parents did not consider their attendance as important and the teachers thought that might be because of their ignorance. They said they did not have any processes for following up the lack of participation by parents in the school programme. They reported, however, that whenever they met with parents after a programme they would ask about the reason for their absence. Edris said:

Parents expressed their feelings, saying ‘what we will do to join there? It is better to celebrate in your own way’. Then we say ‘your presence will add more importance to your children so that your children can realise the significance of the national days, the importance of our national days, and they can carry that for their rest of their lives’.

Teachers complained that parents do not attach any importance to their presence in the national programmes, and instead they attach importance to going to their work. They reported that most parents considered the celebration of national days to be school matters and they could not see any need for their presence at them.

Besides commemoration of national programmes, teachers reported that they would invite parents during result announcement time which is twice in a year, after the half yearly examination and after the final end of the year examination. Parental response and participation on the result announcement days were similar to the celebration days. Edris stated:

During the result announcement time a tiny number of parents join us. The average percentage of the attendance of the parents is maximum five percent. Those who do not attend do not even inform us whether they will attend or not and also do not share the reason of their inability to participate.

When I later spoke with parents on their own, they said that they did not feel comfortable going school result announcement day and they thought they might not be able to respond to comments about their children's result. Shahana shared a similar understanding from her experience:

Parents do not feel confident about their children's results, and they were nervous that they would not be able to say anything about the reason for the results, and do not want to face the situation.

Some parents considered that teachers were inviting them specifically to ask questions about their children's performance and they were not ready to respond. Teachers suggested that it was a lack of parental concern about their children's educational activities that made parents feel uncomfortable about accepting the invitation.

In addition, I learned that schools tended to invite parents once in a year at a time that suited the school to a programme. The reason for the meeting would be teachers' desire to give a message to parents about their responsibilities for their children's education. At the same time, the school would see this as an opportunity to raise the school's overall situation. They would also invite local people, members of parliament, and local political party's members, mostly from ruling party, to this programme. School authorities would feel hopeless because of the lack of parental participation. Emdad described the problem:

When we invite parents to come for parent's assembly, most of the parents do not come; they show their apathy about it. If parents can collaborate with us and look after their children at home then it would be easy for the students to develop their education.

Teachers talked about the lack of courtesy on the part of parents and shared their disappointed that parents did not respond to their invitation and did not seem to feel any need to inform teachers whether they were attending or not. It is practice in Bangladesh society that if anyone cannot accept an invitation from their relatives, they would at least inform their relatives of whether they are attending or not, or at least later share the reason of why they failed to attend. However, teachers reported that parents were not showing such courtesy to them, which upset them. Afsar, an assistant teacher showed his disappointment when he said:

When we arrange any programme aiming to bring most of the parents in the school, a little number of parents attends those programmes. They never informed us whether they are attending or not. They do not show that courtesy with us; on the other hand, they blame us that they have not been informed properly.

It struck me as unusual that parents are not responding to teachers' invitations to the school programme. It is unusual in the sense that teachers hold a position of respect in society and parents usually show their respect to teachers. It seemed to me that it would be culturally natural for parents to show their appreciation of school's request and attend and enjoy the programmes. That parents were neither responding to the teachers' invitations nor informing them of whether they would come or not seemed to indicate the gap between parents and teachers, and to show the limited degree of sharing that was taking place.

When do parents visit the school by choice?

Teachers talked about the times when parents do come to the school and pointed out that while they do not respond the school's invitations, they come when it suits their immediate needs. Teachers reported that one constant reason parents come to the school is to try to negotiate reduction of fees for their children. Emdad stated:

When we failed to get them in our invitation, then some parents attend the school without invitation. They visit us for their purpose. Those visits come at some particular times. Parents want to meet with us only for two purposes. Parents attend the school when they need to reduce financial things and negotiate to promote their children into the next class. That time we do not need to invite them.

Many teachers expressed criticism of parents for attaching importance to the fees they need to pay but not to participating in school programmes. Although students do not need to pay anything for their basic study there are some fees that need to be paid for examination expenses and for session charge on a year basis. So when the school would ask for the fees, parents would come to request reductions of the amount. Tahmina, a head teacher, pointed out some parents, saying:

Parents are not coming to school, but look they are coming one by one for reducing the amount of fees. Some of them are too poor to pay their school fees, but there are some others who come to ask for reduction without any reason, they do not need it, and it is like their habit.

Tahmina had invited me to visit the school on the day parents would come to fill in the forms for the SSC examination. She knew how hard it was for teachers to reach parents in this region. So she chose a day when they would come willingly in order to negotiate fees. Since I hoped to talk casually and spontaneously with parents I took the opportunity to visit on the scheduled day. I asked a number of parents about their reason for coming to school. Like several other parents, Lal Mia, a father, said:

Usually, I do not visit the school as I do not get time and I do not need to visit, but this time I visit to talk to the teachers about reducing my children's fees. I am

unable to pay that amount now. Without fees, they will not allow my kids for the exam. So I am here to convince teachers to reduce how much I have to pay.

Minhaj, a teacher, described for me the various occasions, and underlying reasons, when parents would visit the school without getting any invitation from teaching staff. He told me that parents visit when they needed to request teachers to promote their children who failed to get promotion for the next class. Often in the negotiation parents would blame teachers and raise questions about their professionalism. Sometimes teachers would experience embarrassing situations created by the parents. Minhaj said:

Usually, parents do not visit the school; they visit only when their children failed to get a promotion to the next class. In visiting school, they frequently criticise us about why their children failed to get a promotion to the next class. I do not pay less money for my children, they might say; you people do not take care properly.

I was interested to note that some teachers had a positive attitude to such visits; they talked to me about how they could positively utilise the opportunity to meet parents. For example, one head teacher told me about how he would find interesting ways to inform parents about their responsibilities for their children's education. In our later discussions some other teachers came to consider this as one of their chances to discuss children's performance with their parents. They suggested they could first talk about positive aspects of a student and then offer further advice. In that respect Tahmina said:

We can utilise that time when parents visit for their own purpose. We can make them understand their role and other responsibilities for their children's education, and I think it will work.

Reasons for lack of parental response

My own previous experience in the field and conversation with the teachers and community people reflects that lack of response to school invitations is a common complaint about parents in the rural context of Bangladesh. Therefore I talked to both teachers and parents in this study to seek explanations of why parents were not responding to the invitations from teachers.

The process of invitation emerged as a factor, particularly from the viewpoint of parents. It was pointed out that the invitation process creates the first impression and determines the

success of a programme. The majority were not happy with the way teachers invited parents. They said that teachers in this region seemed to be careless about inviting parents in an appropriate way. In most cases teachers would send an invitation message to parents through students. A few schools used an invitation letter which was also sent through the students. Teachers would not follow up the invitations; they did not check whether the message of invitation reached the parents or not.

My daughter is studying in this school for four years. However, I have not received any invitation for any meeting or any parental assembly. If I could receive any letter, I would come. The invitation letters never come to us.

Maya, a mother of a student, was explaining her reason for failing to respond to invitations from the school. Her explanation suggests she did care about her daughters' education and that she was continuing her efforts to do something better for her daughter. I learned that her husband was away from his family because his job was in another district and so she took responsibility for her daughters' education. She revealed that she was upset by the manner of teachers' communication with her. Other parents who I interviewed expressed similar opinions and experiences.

In the group interviews teachers defended their actions, and Nasir Uddin, a head teacher, boldly denied parents' complaints against school and teachers and reversed the accusations back to the parents. He shared his last experience of issuing an invitation to parents and the response he got back from the parents. He said:

In the month of February we distributed a total number of 402 invitation letters to the parents through our students, but only 19 parents responded on that day and attended with us.

Jahurul, a parent, stood up and agreed with the head teacher saying that he had received the invitation letter and had attended on that day. Nasir Uddin, a teacher, seemed to be embarrassed by what parents were claiming so that he stood up and showed a sample copy of the invitation letter he had distributed to parents:

Please look, here is my invitation letter and here is a register, where I kept the names of all those I sent letters to, and it documents that I sent the invitation letter. It is nothing but a complaining tendency to us by the parents. Not only do they

refuse the invitation letter, parents do not even respond after seeing the result card what we (indicating his staff) send through our students.

Emdad also asserted:

Parents do not feel the importance to talk with the teachers and do not want to know why their children are not performing well.

I wanted to know from the parents why they were not showing their interest to find out more about their children's performance and what they did after getting the result card. Most of the parents replied in a similar same to way Bilkis. She said:

I do not know about a result card; my son never gave it to me. So what can I say about that? Today I will discuss with my son to know about this and find out the reason behind this.

This argument reflects the communication gap that existed and the continuing process of blaming one another. It indicates that there is a very limited degree of engagement of parents in the school and that the interactions between parents and teachers were often suspicious and adversarial. It also indicated that students were not being completely honest with either their parents or their teachers.

I reflected that it could be that students are not taking the message seriously and that they are forgetting to share it with their parents, or that they are sharing it too late for their parents to manage to make time for the visit. The student's behaviour could be intentional, or a natural process of forgetting. Emdad later shared his assumption about the reason for the gap between teachers and parents. He argued:

In our school, some students do not want to bring their parents to the school and do not show their result to their parents, and the reason is that they are not performing well and some of them want to keep their result and activities hidden from their parents.

Emdad's explanation suggests that students have secret things what they do not want to disclose with their parents. It evokes questions about the activities that students do not want to disclose and about how teachers and parents should best deal with such secrets. These are issues that will be discussed further in Chapter Seven.

In the group discussion parents continued to stress the insufficiency of the invitation process and the need to ensure that the invitation letter and the result card reached to them. Monir, a parent, stated his desire to receive the invitation letter and to be an active participant in activities. He suggested:

The teacher needs to be more careful and to be able to confirm that the invitation letter reaches the parent's hand. If teachers can distribute the invitation letter themselves or by an employee and not by the student, it will create a greater sense of importance and parents will be encouraged to attend and respond to the invitation.

The style and insecure process of making the invitation was one issue that was extensively discussed. Parents' need to focus on their paid employment was another. Parents explained that they were busy with their work, and therefore they would fail to remember the date of a school meeting at school. The need to focus on earning a living and family needs took priority. Tapash explained his own experience and his understanding of the parental situation. He stated:

I am busy with my livelihood and am busy with my work; I forgot the date of invitation, and I missed attending. Suppose I received a letter one week before from school. Considering my situation I have to forget the date. I think other parents have the same (আত্মভোলা) oblivion problem like me. For that reason most of the time they forget about the invitation letter.

Torab, another parent from that area, suggested several ways of attracting parents and helping them realise the importance of their participation. Parents might then, he argued, better manage their time and attend the event. He suggested:

After sending a letter for a meeting or any event in the school, it would be nice if teachers would remind me. Teachers can contact us or can use a mike for an announcement to remind all parents. I hope that would create an awareness of the importance of parents. When I see such activities by the school, then I will become more curious and will not want to miss the opportunity to attend. Then I will try to somehow manage my time.

A shift in teachers' awareness

In early discussions teachers complained about parents not coming to school and not responding to their invitations. However, after some time and perhaps as a result of ongoing conversations some teachers began to talk differently about their inability to bring parents into school programmes. Emdad, for example, acknowledged:

We (*indicating his colleagues*) also do not take any active steps to bring them, the parents, to our school. We do not even think about it deeply and we have never tried to find out the possible solution. On this issue, I am ready to accept our negligence.

As I talked further with teachers in several schools I found that they tended to limit their comments to the statement that parents were not coming, but did not give examples of strategies, beyond the initial invitation, for bringing parents into the school. They acknowledged they did not spend time enquiring into why parents were not coming, or devising further steps to bring them. They sometimes said that they could not give more effort to bringing parents into school programmes. They talked about the shortage of time: they were already busy with their assigned class work and had to spend time with their own families; they had no further time to invite parents individually.

Edris argued that it was not realistic in view of his current work pressure to spend more time in bringing in parents. He said:

Truly speaking we are too busy with our classes and already crushed under the teaching load. After conducting our classes, we lost our courage to do that. We do not get time to check with parents.

Some other teachers, like Afsar, acknowledged that they were already dissatisfied with their job and so did not want to put in more effort. Afsar said:

If we want to make parents aware of their children's schooling, then we should go from door to door to raise their awareness of their children's schooling and their role in it, For that we need to spend extra time. However, when I am not happy with my current situation and facing different problems in my daily life, then I do not want to spend extra time for that. I prefer to spend my time for my own purposes.

Parents' perspectives

Teachers acknowledged that poverty was one of the reasons why parents failed to attend the school programmes. According to my personal knowledge as well the teachers' reports, parents in this area are living in poverty, and they struggle with their living. Parents normally work every day and for the whole day to meet their needs. Emdad explained:

Parents do not want to visit school by stopping their income for one day. If they miss one day, they may lose that job. They cannot afford to be away from their job as they dependant on it.

Emdad added:

Most of the parents are from this area are day-base workers. Each day they need to search for their job, and sometimes it becomes hard to get a job.

When I talked to parents they also described how one day's work was important for them and how the income was important for their family. Some fathers did not have other earning members in their family, so the demanding needs of the family were their priority.

Lal Mia explained his situation:

I do not have any other assets except this house (indicating the one small room of his house), and I am the only one earning member of this family. Because of that, all the time I need to spend my day with work.

In addition to talking about family needs, Parents talked about the aimless discussion that they had observed in the various programmes and how it made them reluctant to attend the school functions. They compared importance and then they chose to go to work rather than attending school functions. Kohinor, a parent said:

We need to think about the reason of why invitation from school is failing to attract us to attend.

Another parent, Torab was more specific:

I attended different activities before. However, I did not get any constructive discussion there. Everyone delivered aimless discussion, mainly political. I have

not got anything for my learning. So, I prefer to go for my work, not to attend a school function.

In talking later with teachers, they also tended to agree that mostly they focus on making their programme successful and less on getting messages about education to parents. Minhaj, a teacher described what he saw as a need for planning for specific inclusion of parents in the school's events:

In our school programmes I have not seen any agenda for the parents, and we never discussed such an agenda ourselves. In the school programme I delivered my speech whatever coming to my mind instantly, and perhaps parents miss to receive anything new from me. I think by not making a plan for my speech I failed to attract parents by my speeches. I believe that we should add our agenda for discussion in the programme with the parents, and we need to work on that.

Minhaj was articulating his realisation that parents want to listen something from the teachers what is genuinely important for them and necessary for their children's education. Other teachers also admitted that school programmes did not overtly address parents' interests. In my discussions with parents they also affirmed that they wanted more focused discussion about things that related to their children's education from teachers rather than discussion of other issues not related to schooling.

Teachers I talked with also talked about parental illiteracy as a cause of parents not feeling comfortable about communicating with the school and not wanting to attend school programmes. Emdad said:

Because of the parental illiteracy they have an inferiority complex, and this keeps them away from school. When a parent does not know what their children are studying in the school, they cannot look after their children. They usually say to us: what will I do to go to school, as I do not know anything about education?

In my interviews with parents, some made similar statements. For example, Lal Mia said:

I am illiterate, I cannot understand what education is, and I not even figure out what is inside the education. That is why I never attend the school programmes.

Parental illiteracy is a widespread in rural Bangladesh and may be a major reason for parents ignoring school invitations. Besides the presence at school events of politicians

and other elite members of society may make them feel uncomfortable and unwanted. I discuss these issues further below and in the next chapter.

Politics and parental engagement

I learned that parents in this area held a range of political views, and that sometimes the presence of political personnel in the school event could have a negative impact on parental attendance. Those who held different political affiliations did not want to attend the meeting. Some parents I talked with claimed that in these events political personnel took the chance to praise their own activities rather than address parental issues. Salim stated:

I expect the topic of the discussion on the day of parental assembly should focus on only parental consciousness and educational purposes, but my reflection is that most of the time people talk about political issues rather than parental awareness. I lost my desire to attend in the other time.

From our discussions it emerged that if they came to a school meeting parents expected that the conversation would be focused on them and the problems they might have with their children. Instead it seemed they found discussion of political activities. Torab stated:

It became a political programme rather than parental assembly. I do not get anything new from such a programme, and the initiatives they have taken do not fulfil my expectations. I am not agreeing to listen to all those political speeches after sacrificing my valuable time.

These comments indicated that political involvement in the school programmes had a negative effect on many parents. Sometimes parents said they kept away from school and its activities because of the intervention of political issues. Monir, a parent, was silent during a group discussion but chose to accompany me afterwards. He indicated that he wanted to share something with me that he could not share in front of others and it seemed like he had been holding his feelings for a long time. Monir said:

After nearly about two years, I attended today. I planned to visit today because you are a non-political person. I do not feel comfortable communicating and participating in school activities because of highly politicisation of each and every

aspect. Politicians always consider their interest in the decision-making process rather than school related interests.

When I talked with teachers and head teachers it was pointed out to me that politicians and local leaders are important in the community and that teachers are dependent on politicians for school development. Politicians have the capacity to allocate funds to schools from government funds. Didar Hossain, a head teacher, clarified the situation and the reason of inviting political personnel in his school programmes in this way:

Political characters are the local authority for any government support for the school. For any school, we need to take their favour as they are holding power within our locality. They are the local decision makers for distributing government allocated funds for the support of any school. So if we do not involve them in any of our programmes, they will not consider giving support to our school.

Iftekhar Zaman, a head teacher, described his reason for involving political people in school programmes. He stated:

Without satisfying the political character it would not be possible for us to run our school activities in a normal way. It will not be a wise decision for us to let our relationship with the local leaders become a negative one. Without their kind concern school development would not be possible.

These head teachers' comments made me realise that they felt they had good reason to invite political figures to their school functions, and that they had some clear expectations from them. School's limited funds together with the demands of developing facilities and resources made it important for them to involve politicians. Abul Hossain, a head teacher held a vibrant urgency in his voice as he explained:

It is an unwritten tradition that when we invite any politicians, they would donate something to us to fulfil our shortage. At that time we can get the chance to talk about the shortages in our school, and it is common that they will announce something for our school when delivering their speech. This type of help from them is very necessary for us, and we do not miss the chance.

Reflection on the themes that emerged from my initial interviews

The overarching finding that emerged from this round of interviews was there were limited opportunities for rural parents to engage with schools and that parents rarely came to school for other purposes than to negotiate their children's fees or to protest when their children had not been promoted to the next class. Teachers talked about their disappointment about parents' absence from school programmes and judged that most parents were disinterested in their children's schooling and unaware of their children's overall behaviour. Parents talked about their need to commit their time to earning a living and complained about the apparent carelessness of schools in the way they failed to ensure that their communications actually reached parents. Parents complained that programmes in schools usually centred on political and other influential figures and so were a waste of their time, especially when they disagreed with the politics. Teachers, and especially head teachers, explained that they needed to involve and win the favour of politicians and other local power holders in order to secure funding for their under-resourced schools. Teachers suggested that illiteracy and poverty were significant factors in preventing parents from coming into the school. Parents also talked about their very limited family resources and their overwhelming need to devote their time to work in order to feed their families. In addition, many parents suggested that their lack of knowledge of schooling made it difficult for them to talk to teachers and stated that because teachers were the educated ones they were the ones who should best know how to ascertain and meet students' learning needs.

At the same time both parties seemed acknowledged the desirability and potential value of good communication between them. Good communication, it was repeatedly suggested, would enable parents to help their children to overcome weaknesses in learning and would ensure teachers paid attention to the students. Good communication, it had also been proposed, would also contribute to reduce student absenteeism from classes.

It is noteworthy that in the teachers' explanations of the benefits of good communication they tended to see themselves as they ones who would identify students' needs and indicate how parents could add their support. It is also noteworthy that several parents disclaimed knowledge of their children's progress and needs and deferred to the teachers.

Interpreting these themes in terms of discourse

These themes might usefully be considered in terms of the concepts of discourse. The work of Foucault (Lazaroiu, 2013) explores discourses as ways of constituting knowledge and social practices. He argues that the way society identifies and talks about behaviours shapes their social legitimacy. He argues that these constructions are based on a legacy of social discourses. Gee (1992, p108) considers discourses as processes that display membership of a social network and argues that a network's discourse "rewards and sanctions characteristic ways of acting, talking, believing, valuing and interacting, and in doing so it incorporates a normative or ideal set of mental associations and folk theories towards which its members more or less converge". I find this conceptualisation useful because it identifies the socially and historically moulded ideologies that shape teachers' and parents' opinions about each other and about the processes of schooling. For that reason I decided to initially report my participants' comments at a surface level as an indication of prevalent discourses. In the next chapters I will further examine the historical, social, economic and political conditions that underlie parents' and teachers' attitudes and behaviours.

All those I interviewed acknowledged to some extent or another desirability of parental engagement in schooling. This affirmation can be seen as part of a national discourse that affirms the value of education as a community asset and that has created policies that call for parental engagement in schooling. I position it as a discourse here because at present there are few strategies to implement the policy expectations but parental engagement is constantly rearticulated as an important and supposedly obvious value. There has been little investigation within Bangladesh of what such engagement would mean at ground level or of the conditions and actions that would allow for productive meeting and communication.

"Unconscious", "illiterate", "do not want to engage": these were the repeated and emphatic complaints from the teachers I interviewed about parents. The description of the parents by the teachers was indicative of a firm perception within this rural community which is echoed throughout the education sectors and frequently articulated by educational administrators who see parental indifference as a reason for failures in providing quality education in accordance with policy. The interviews cited in this study show that these perceptions influence parents' attitudes about themselves as they too often made

statements which reflected similar understandings. I suggest that what is being created is a discourse of humility by parents, which in turn further affirms the discourse of indifference.

Discourses can reflect significant needs in society. In the interviews I have reported there were many statements of conditions in society that call for better communication and interaction between school and family. These are further discussed in Chapter Seven. Some participants in this study argued that both parents and teachers need to bridge the gap and take combined initiatives. The discourses within society that I have identified create a block for efforts to develop engagement. In Chapters Seven and Eight I will explore ways schools could work with parents who are willing to become engaged in order to create another discourse, one of change, within the community.

As in other countries there are many and varied political discourses in Bangladesh. Parents in this study held allegiances to different political parties and to different local politicians. Invitations to school functions that were centred on a particular political figure tended to irritate many of the parents I interviewed. However, national policy encourages schools to involve the community in its celebration of national days and to affirm nationhood. Local and national politicians are the usual guests of honour in the process of celebrating national identity. Moreover the goodwill of local politicians is necessary for many rural schools' financial operation. The resultant discourses of national loyalty are a common part of school practice. However, parents often adhere to different political discourses and this tends to keep them away from school. Other parents simply see the school's invitations as irrelevant as they seem to constitute parental presence as audience to the main business of pleasing a political figure. I see this cluster of discourses as one that it may be difficult to completely change. However, two-way communication about the nature of the celebrations and about what happens in the programme could create some change in expectations and perhaps lead to better interaction.

My study indicated that within the community two stakeholder groups were positioned in a degree of opposition to each other. Because of that there was limited interaction, and there was also limited expectation of sharing between them. This tended to prevent further initiatives. Parents' expectations were not reaching the teachers and similarly teachers' expectations were not being effectively communicated to parents. Whatever understandings and hopes vibrated within either party, they seemed unable to understand

each other's needs or hesitations. School Manage Committees (SMC) and Parents Teachers Associations (PTA) are the bodies of a school that have been set up to link the voices of the parents and teachers for changing engagement practice. I am arguing that, for them to be able to fulfil this role, they need to better understand the conditions that shape parents' and teachers' attitudes and actions and so move beyond reiteration of prevalent discourses. Parents themselves may not be in positions to disrupt the existing discourses; I suspect that that initiatives need to come from sensitive and critically aware leadership within schools.

Alignment with themes in Bangladesh research

These thematic trends in the discussions that were held with the participants in this study align to a large extent with themes in Bangladesh based research about parental engagement. In particular Kabir and Akter (2014), Ali (2011) and Rasheed (2011) reported research about Bangladesh that finds that the low socio-economic background of parents and their illiteracy blocked initiatives of engagement processes in schooling. More precisely Kabir and Akter (2014) stated that parents tended to restrict their responsibilities for their children's education to sending them to school and that they believed they did not have anything to do with the schooling, and for that reason, they showed their unwillingness to engage in the school. In a similar way, Ali (2011) pointed out the lack of interest by parents and found that the parents studied do not consider it necessary to get in touch with the school. Rasheed (2011) found that both parents and teachers are not willing to take the responsibilities for the poor results that many rural students achieve in some subjects and that they would tend to blame one another.

Parent participants in my study talked negatively about the involvement of political personnel in school programmes and maintained that their presence created a block to parental engagement in some way. On the other hand teachers explained that they needed to involve politicians in various school programmes in order to secure their patronage and funding. Findings from Ali (2011) showed similar political influence and pressure on school activities which teachers could not avoid.

Both Ali (2011) and Rasheed (2011) emphasised the importance of home-school communication. The argued it was necessary to create awareness of the need of engagement by parents as well as contributing to students' achievement. However, Kabir

and Akter (2014) examined the practical context in Bangladesh and found that parental engagement in secondary schools is still underdeveloped and undervalued. In addition, Ali (2011) discussed the tensions inherent in engaging parents in the school in situations where they are poor and struggling with their daily life.

Alignment with themes in the international literature

I also found similar themes occurring in the international literature that suggested that similar problems, and possibly discourses, existed in areas of other countries. In my study I found head teachers were repeatedly commenting that *Parents are not coming*, and a similar complaint was addressed by Mapp and Hong (2010) who shared experiences with the district level school administrators, principals and teachers in different places in the United States. Mapp reported workshops where principals stated they could not reach parents and complained that parents did not communicate with the teachers. Mapp and Hong talked about these as supposedly hard-to-reach families and argued that this description was a myth that needed to be debunked. A similar finding that found by Deverall (2015) in her study in the rural context of California where she found certain parents do not consider making contacting with teachers about their children's academic or behavioural progress, and suggested that in order to improve the situation teachers needed to develop communication with the parents on a regular basis.

Lawson (2003) in a United States study found that while teachers perceived the importance of parental involvement to support students' achievement they reported that parents were neglecting their responsibilities, and that low incomes was limiting their involvement. Teachers reported that these uninvolved parents would visit the school only when a crisis would arise with their children. Also in a United States study, Cooper and Crosnoe (2007) found that parents communicated with the teachers when their children experienced problems in school. They argued, however, that parental economic disadvantage was not the only reason for limited parental involvement, and they found less involvement from parents whose children were lower in achievement and suggested parents' involvement was partially child. Their findings echo comments made by parents and teachers in this study.

In another United States study Prater, Bermudez & Owens (1997) reported that many parents, like the parents in my study, indicated they had not been well informed by the school of their school programmes and that is why they failed to attend. Ahmed & Said (2013) studied a hundred school principals in Pakistan and found that they were not playing an active role to engage parents with the school and so parental involvement was negligible. The school principals considered that parents were not capable enough and not knowledgeable enough to be involved with their children education, so the act of sending their children to school was only the evidence of parents' involvement.

These studies and others cited in the literature review in Chapter Three, indicate that non-involvement by parents in education is a perceived problem in many other countries as well as in Bangladesh, and that parents' economic conditions and their lack of education are perceived as key causes. Lack of appropriate initiatives by schools was also identified as a causative factor. Differences in students' achievement has also been discussed as influencing parents' engagement as well as being influenced by it. It seems, therefore, that similar kinds of discourses operate in many countries. Thus the exploration of what lies behind such discourses and how those discourses might be disrupted is relevant not only to Bangladesh but also to other countries. That exploration is reported in the following chapters.

Chapter Six: What bases for engagement?

We are the general people from this area, just living hand to mouth. What will we do if we join a school programme?

My son is going to school and learning something. That is enough for me.

Parents accept it as a truth that the teacher will do whatever is needed for their children's education.

(Local voices)

The previous chapter reported teachers' accounts of what they expected from the parents and of their disappointment that parents did not seem to take interest in their children's schooling. It also reported parents' accounts of why they did not talk to teachers or did not respond to invitations to participate in school functions. It suggested that both sets of accounts could be considered in terms of the way they represent, and also reinforce, dominant discourses in Bangladesh. This chapter examines the context of rural schooling and rural parenting in more detail and identifies a number of issues that make it difficult for parents to communicate with schools. It reports parents' accounts of how they view their children's schooling and their own role in relation to the process of schooling. It also reports rural parents' social and economic status and the role education has played in their own lives. These reports come in part from interviews with parents and teachers and in part from the publically available documents and statistics. The chapter concludes with an examination of concept of cultural capital and how it may serve to illuminate the relationship between rural parents and schools.

Parents in the rural context

International research has shown that parental involvement with the school has a positive impact on children's education, especially when parents work together with teachers in an effective way (Epstein, 1984; Epstein, 2001; Jeynes, 2005; Kimaro & Machumu, 2015). It has also shown that parents' socio-economic conditions and educational background play

a vital role in determining their capacity for engagement in their children's schooling (Kavanagh, 2013).

Participants in this study made similar statements. Teachers, and some parents, stated that the socio-economic condition and educational background of the parents in this region did not allow them to play a role in their children's education. Teachers repeatedly referred to parents' lack of literacy and their focus on providing for the basic needs for their families and saw these factors as constraining parents' understanding of their children's educational needs and as reasons for them to be disengaged from their children's education. Teachers said that parents were not paying attention to their children's education that they had minimal concern about education and that most of their time was focused on thinking about their daily work. A typical comment was made by Moshiur, an assistant teacher:

The parents in this region are so simple and dwelling in the village. They do not show any vision for their children's education, the way conscious parents do. Parents from this area normally spend their time for earning enough to meet the daily needs of their family. Most of the parents are involving with their work in the others' fields as a day labour or on a day-to-day work basis. In the same way, because of their illiteracy, they are not knowledgeable about their children's education. Mainly they do not know what to do with their children schooling, or how to do it. Because of that, they cannot take care of their children.

Moshiur's observations were echoed in various ways by most of the other teachers in my study. Afsar, for example, explained that the school was dealing with parents of a particular type:

Because of parents' illiteracy and poverty, they are not really concerned about their children's education and also they cannot spend their time on their children's education because of their busy and hard life.

Most of the teachers shared their experience that, because of parents' illiteracy and their busy schedule, they were not getting any support from parents and parents were not taking any initiatives for improving students' learning. They reported that whenever they tried to involve parents in different activities parents would not show interest and would not be willing to be with the teachers, and so parents were not playing a supporting role in their

children's schooling. Teachers told me they realised the importance of parental support for children's education. However, from teachers' attitudes and comments, it was clear that they felt they were missing the support from parents.

I noted in my field journal that these descriptions by teachers of parental indifference to their children's schooling did not seem to be made as a complaint against parents but rather as statements of unavoidable fact. Teachers simply seemed to feel that it was not possible to involve parents in issues of education and they seemed to see the lack of involvement as one more issue that made their own work harder.

My own observations of the families in the district and of their life style underlined the hardships and poverty of families' lives. Parents needed to work long and hard days in their struggle to meet the everyday family demands for survival. It was apparent to me that they always seemed to be running to keep up with work pressures and so indeed did not get much chance to think about their children's schooling. The primary focus of most parents in the district, as in other rural areas, was about managing to provide food and other basic family needs. Feeding their children took priority over thinking about their education

Apart from the stresses of poverty, parents' illiteracy also prevented them from involvement with their children's education.

Emdad expressed his frustration at parents' inability to understand their children's education:

Because of parental illiteracy, they do not understand and consider the importance of education and their children's education. Everyone does not understand the importance of education (*taking a deep breath with disappointment*).

Teachers repeatedly showed their disappointment with their dealing with parents; they talked about the additional distress they experienced when they did not get any parents who showed awareness of what they were trying to teach their children.

Not all parents in the region were illiterate or living in poverty. Teachers talked to me about parents who were aware of the value of education and could support their children's education, and could communicate with teachers. However, those parents, I was told, were not sending their children to the local rural school; they were sending their children to the

urban areas. Those who could not send their children to an urban school would at least send them to the school situated in the regional headquarters. Teachers told me that as a consequence of this preference for urban schools, rural schools were missing out on the input that could come from parents who were thinkers and positive initiators. Moshiur explained:

Rich and conscious parents have migrated to the urban areas. If anyone who has some resources cannot send their children to the district level school, at least they send their children to the upazila headquarter schools. It blocks any type of co-operation from the parents.

Thus the teachers were suggesting that there were no proactive parents left in the schools' communities who could be an example for the other parents. The next chapter further explores this concept.

The trend for better-off parents to send their children to urban schools is well documented (Amin, 2017; Alam, 2016; Salahuddin, 2016). Parents who have the means send their children to the best quality schools they can afford and, if they can, they hire additional tutors. Although the behaviours of parents who can afford to send their children to urban schools is outside the scope of this study, it is noteworthy that literature (Kabir & Akter, 2014; Manzoor, 2013) suggests that these parents firmly believe that education will secure their children's futures. Therefore, their primary engagement with education is the securing of reputed schools and additional private tuition for their children rather than direct involvement with the schools. It is also noteworthy that local rural schools do not attract wealthier rural parents.

How parents saw their role in education

Several parents in my study expressed similar views to those of the teachers. They explained their reason for not responding to the school's invitations and not communicating with teachers individually to talk about their children's educational progress. Parents identified their educational background and their economic conditions as factors that affected their thinking and their decisions to not respond to the school's invitations. I noted in my field journal that my initial conversations with parents always seemed to come back to the same issues: that parents felt powerless to do anything about their children's learning, that they did not consider themselves as able to understand the

processes of education and so were unable to do anything for their children's schooling. Various parents told me they were not smart enough to handle any talk about education, and that their existing conditions and way of life did not allow them to even think about, and far less understand, their children's education. I reflected in my journal that the parents I had talked to seemed to have surrendered any expectation of contributing to their children's learning and that it would be unrealistic to expect contribution from their side without being able to change their way of thinking.

The sense of powerlessness was evident when Lal Mia described his situation:

I do not have the power or light of education, so I have failed to understand the inner meanings of education. That is why I cannot pay a deep respect for education. As we are parents, what we do may not have any style like the educated people. We would not fit in with the school.

Lal Mia's comments reflect a lack of confidence that I found was shared by other parents. It seemed they, like Lal Mia, placed themselves in a position where their ideas about themselves acted as a barrier against thinking about their children's education. I concluded that parents were undervaluing their potential and they were translating their self-evaluation into practice. I wrote in my field journal that if schools wanted to develop engagement processes with parents, it would be necessary to also develop parents' confidence in their capacity to play a role in education, and that would be a challenge for the teachers.

I found that both teachers and parents voiced similar reasons for the school not being successful in encouraging parents to become involved in their children schooling. Javed, a teacher, showed his feeling of distress when he said:

From their educational and social background, parents think school activities are not their matter, and they are not eligible for schooling activities. They keep a strong belief about their inability, so that even though we teachers are inviting them to come to the different school programmes we cannot convince them.

Julhash, a parent, described his sense of separation from school programmes:

We are the general people from this area, just living hand to mouth. What will we do if we join a school programme? School programmes and activities are the

teachers' and children's programmes, and it is better to leave them to celebrate the agenda and do their operations in their way.

My initial dialogues with participants indicated that parents' educational and economic backgrounds created mindsets that did not allow them to think about engagement in educational activities. However, when reflecting on these dialogues in my field journal I recalled that research, such as that by Hoover- Dempsey and Sandler (1997) has shown that parents' sense of efficacy is necessary for their engagement as are their beliefs about what they can do for their children, and that the research also suggested that engagement processes initiated by schools would not succeed without addressing parental role construction. My field notes showed a process of reflection that continued through my analysis and that lead to the discussion at the end of this chapter.

Talking to teachers about progress

From my discussion with teachers and my own observations in the field it was apparent that the parents in my study had little knowledge about educational activities at school and were not able to check on their children's study at home. I found that parents rarely asked their children about how they were progressing at school and I was told that the reason was that their own lack of education made it hard for them to understand what their children should be doing. Shahana, a teacher, stated that parental illiteracy made them unaware of what their children's learning involved and stopped them from looking after their children's educational activities at home. She said:

The reason is that the parents are illiterate, and they cannot understand or notice any work when students return home. That is why parents cannot pay their attention to their children education.

Parents also talked about their inability to help their children. For example, Sabur stated:

I cannot take care of my children educational activities, and I do not think I can do something for my son's education, which is why I do not go to the school to know about his education.

I found that parents' need to expend their energy in hard physical work and their ignorance about what actually happens in schools made it very hard for them to pay attention to their children's study and form understandings about their progress. This in turn led to the

creation of distance from the school and teachers. Maruf, an assistant teacher, shared his perception:

Parents have a type of fear about school and us teachers. When we invite them to any school programmes and especially in the result announcement time, we found that they are not attending. When I met any parents, I would ask to know the reason for not attending and they would reply: 'I am not well informed about my son's (or daughter's) education, so what would I do if I was there? What can I say there about my children education?'

Maruf was alluding to his school's practice of inviting parents to the school at the time when results were announced, with the intention of developing relationships with parents and providing them with feedback on their children's performance so that they could see what they needed to contribute at home to support for their children's learning. However, most parents did not respond to the teacher's invitation. I found that many parents did not feel comfortable about attending school functions because of a fear of talking to the teachers. Julhash shared his reason for not considering attendance when teachers invited him:

I am not well aware about my children's education, so I do not feel comfort to be there during the result announcement time. I feel if the teacher would ask me something, then what will I reply? At the same time, I can hear the result from my children. What is the difference? So it is better to go for my work without missing any day.

The fear expressed by Julhash seems to come from not being able to pay attention to his children's study at home and not knowing how to comment to the teacher about their progress. Perhaps, as he said, his children would report their results accurately to him and he would understand what they mean. And perhaps he would not really understand, without explanation by the teachers. In any event it seems he did not want to expose his ignorance to the teachers. Moreover, he did not want to miss a day's work, and probably could not afford to do so. I reflected in my journal that it would be no easy matter to create dialogue between parents and teachers.

Parents' socio-economic and educational background

The preceding comments and reflections by teachers and parents have identified that the families of the district are predominantly peasant families, that the students in the schools are, for the most part, the first generation attending school, and that their parents have little understanding of the education processes as well as struggling to meet their families' survival needs. Parents' attitudes and understandings can be further understood by considering the historical and current context of education in the region as well as in Bangladesh as a whole.

I have given the pseudonym of Nandanpur to the district where my study is based. It is located on the banks of one of the three great rivers that define the landscape of Bangladesh. According to national statistics (BBS, 2017) the population of the district has a whole is 3,605,083 who live in an area of approximately 3,414 square kilometres. This means there is a population density of over a thousand people per square kilometre in a land space that is fertile but also very vulnerable to severe seasonal flooding. Thus unlike, many western countries, rural area is not defined by a relatively lighter density of population but rather by primary dependence on farming and absence of urban facilities and technologies.

The total literacy rate of the region is reported as 46.8 % (BBS, 2017), which means that just over half the population is illiterate.

As detailed in Chapter Two the government of Bangladesh has an education policy (2010) that mandates access for all children to education and it supports the policy by providing stipends to support the attendance at school of those children who would in other circumstances be working to support their families. National statistics (BBS, 2017) indicate that the current school attendance rate in the region of my study is 54.9%, which reflects the educational practice in this region.

It is noteworthy that in 1975, four years after the creation of the independent nation of Bangladesh, a report by the Secretary of the Ministry of Education, (Haque, 1975), described Bangladesh as a country "where about 77 per cent of the population are outside the pale of written words". Haque's statistic applied to the country as a whole, and it needs to be read against the fact that urban literacy rates have been, and still are, much higher than rural ones. A similar situation still exists in the rural context. I reflected that in all

probability the parents I interviewed that themselves only attended a year or two of primary school when they were children before they had to leave to help their parents in their work (Nath, 2009). Decades of martial law and growing *free-market* competitiveness had made many small landholders landless. Parents who wanted to bring about change and educate their children often found their dreams blocked by poverty.

The forty years of independent development in Bangladesh have seen significant expansion of the education system, as well as revealing the challenges of providing access to quality education to over twenty thousand secondary schools (BANBEIS, 2016). One of the results of this rapid and expansive change is that large populations in rural areas are seeing their children go to secondary school whereas they, and the majority of their generation, did not have the same opportunities. Schooling is thus a process that is appreciated but only partially understood by large numbers of rural parents, and so parental engagement in education is not only a new concept, as it is in many parts of the world (Bottrell & Goodwin, 2011), but it also seems to many parents to be a practical impossibility. Some of the consequences of parents' lack of personal experience of sustained schooling are examined in the rest of this chapter.

Parental attitudes to discussion of performance and results

One of the consequences is the uncertainty with which parents regard reports of their children's performance and the results they achieve. Many do not want to meet with the teachers to hear about their children's performance. Afsar, a teacher, reported:

Some parents in our region have already made their own predictions about their children's results and performance in their way before the results are published and they decide not to attend any function or meet with the teachers, this is especially so on the result announcement day.

I learned from teachers that they were not sure about the basis on which parents made their decisions about their children's results. Teachers suggested that perhaps parents' assumptions were based mostly on their fear and their imagination, but perhaps they were also based on what they had seen of their children's habits at home. For example, Shahana stated:

Parents assume their children will not get better results in the exam, and their assumption may arise from their observation of their children's activities at home and the way they are spending time with study.

A common perception emerged from my conversations with teachers. They seemed to think that parents showed mental weakness that led them into negative thinking about their children's results and assume poor outcomes without finding out how they were really performing. These unfounded assumptions which made parents decide not to face the teachers came from two causes, teachers suggested. Firstly, parents did not understand what their children were learning at school, and secondly, parents failed to get updated about their children's progress. Alongside the teachers perception I reflected that it was important to consider that parents' educational background did not help them become informed.

Parents also stated their unwillingness to hear unsatisfactory results at school functions. For instance, Selina said:

I never went to school after the results came out. I felt like the teachers may give me *jhari* [snub]. The reason is that my son is not doing well. My son will not take a good position in the school exam.

I noticed that Selina was hesitant when she shared with me the reason for not coming to school when teachers would invite her to attend the day of announcing examination results. Nervousness was reflected in her face when she described why she did not feel comfortable about attending on that day. I reflected in my journal that it would be relevant to further question why Selina did not feel comfortable: did her thoughts come only from her assumptions, or she had experienced a snub previously? Her apprehension highlighted for me the gap between parents and teachers. It seemed from my conversations with both parents and teachers that teachers were perhaps trying in some way to pass responsibilities to the parents for the weak performance of some students.

Julhash, another parent, also explained his reluctance to meet with teachers in terms of his expectations of what he would hear about his son's progress:

If my son does well, only then I can go. He is not doing anything special that would allow me to go with *boro mukh* [big face].

I gathered from these conversations that parents had developed assumptions about their children's results and ability, but they did not feel ready to take any initiatives for changing the results or even for checking if their assumptions were accurate. I reflected in my field journal that these assumptions indicated the insecure relationship between parents and teachers. I found that the parents who participated in this study were not spontaneous about sharing the way they felt about teachers and about the kinds of experiences that they had in talking with them. The gap was never articulated in a direct way. However, some parents did express opinions which indicated their sense of difference from the teachers. Some of them expressed their negative attitudes and because of their hesitancy in talking about these matters I was not able to find out if they created these apprehensions from their lack of real meeting experiences or if they came from their direct previous experience. I reflected how important relationship was in any process of developing parental involvement. A healthy relationship between parents and teachers seemed necessary in order to understand and respond to parents' concerns about school programmes. I noted in my journal that teachers need to not only communicate about students' weakness, which often seem to be a criticism of parents, but also talk positivity about students so that they can make a rapport with parents.

Impact of established social practices

As discussed in the previous chapter, social discourses not only impact on the ways people think but also on the ways they behave. Thus forms of established social practice and social expectations have developed in the community that I studied. Javed, an assistant teacher, shared his perception of the social influences:

There are some parents here, those who might be willing to visit the school and communicate with the teachers, but they feel alone and shy in this process. They think some people might comment behind their backs. Parents think this way because of their lack of confidence in society, and for that reason they fail to gain their courage.

Javed attributed parents' lack of confidence about meeting teachers to a lack of social confidence. On the other hand several parents spoke about their reluctance to go to school in terms of their awareness of probable community responses. Julhash put it this way:

No other parents are going to visit school. What I can tell in the school if I am alone? I do not feel comfort to say anything there. Suppose I am visiting school and I meet with the teachers, then what I will say to them? At the same time my neighbours have a chance to laugh at me.

Julhash's statement indicates that he was not only shy about addressing teachers but also worried about other people's opinions: he was afraid others might sneer at him for assuming he was the kind of person who could freely visit a school.

I reflected that the difference in these two interpretations further highlighted the gaps between teachers' and parents' sense of social awareness. The teachers seemed to be aware that parents felt socially inadequate in their presence and parents voiced similar opinions. However, parents realised that visiting the school would not only expose them to the possibly humiliating gaze of teachers but also to that of their neighbours in the community. I became aware that there was a latent social code within the community that prescribed how parents could behave with regard to the school. I noted in my journal that Keane (2007) had found that parental cultural beliefs, their socio-economic status and their own experience influenced the kinds of engagement they might undertake in their children's education. I reflected that community expectations as much as teacher's attitudes seemed to block parents from communicating with teachers for their children's educational purposes.

Some parents also talked to me about a further inhibiting factor. Julhash stated:

I do not want to create hostility with the teachers. Teachers may consider my visit in a negative way. They may think I am raising the question to them.

Julhash was concerned that teachers might interpret any interest he might show in his son's education as a questioning of their competence and authority. He had mentioned previously that his son was not performing in any "special" way, and so discussion of his progress might be construed as criticism of the teachers. Anxieties like these act to appeared to prevent parents from seeking information about their children's learning progress. I reflected that even if parents were literate they might be reluctant to ask teachers direct questions about what their children were doing at school. I became aware that there were layers of social expectation that made it difficult for individual parents to

approach the school. These are further discussed through the following sections of this chapter.

Sense of inferiority

A sense of differing social status seemed to be a powerful factor affecting parents and perhaps also teachers' attitudes. Parents I spoke with seemed to be aware of their social inferiority to teachers, because of their illiteracy and because of their lower social position. Parents would pay their respects to and honour the school environment and teachers. It seemed to me that sometimes they were overly respectful which created what seemed to be unnecessary problems in their minds. I thought that parents did not feel they had open access to the school because of their lack of education and their social position; they seemed to consider access to school was limited to those who were themselves educated and understood education. Lal Mia stated:

I cannot maintain the school environment, as I am a man of the field. That is why I stay in my own area.

I reflected in my journal that the sense of inferiority was so dominant that it seemed to prevent parents considering their role in their children education. I noted how strong economic and social status seemed to be, and how that status seemed to create a sense of powerlessness and containment.

Lal Mia talked further about his status in relation to his children's teachers:

The head teacher and other teachers do not know me. I am not like those people in this society who are familiar to the teachers. If I would be like them, the teachers might know me. Now, how can I go to the school, meet with the teachers and introduce myself saying 'I am father one of your students'? Is it possible? If they call me, only then can I go there.

I found that teachers were also very aware of the relative status of the parents of the students they taught, as they had learned it from their daily experience since childhood. Parents in this rural region would typically be deferential towards teachers and speak softly to them. The culture of Bangladesh has endowed teachers with such an overtly respected position, and the rural workers have habitually known themselves to be the least powerful people in society.

However, I reflected in my journal about the negative consequences of the kind of respect that was shown. Parents clearly did not feel comfortable about communicating with the teachers, and would seldom get the courage to discuss their children educational issues with them. I had found that talking about their children's learning with the teachers was beyond imagination for several parents.

I found it significant that during a focus group discussion Didar Hossain, a head teacher, openly explained a parent's reticence:

Look at him; he is a shopkeeper, selling fruits in the street. It is the first time he is sitting in front of me. He is not feeling comfortable about seating in front of me. That is why he is not talking too much.

When Didar was explaining his behaviour the parent was listening with shyness and respect. That was his way of his consenting to Didar's introduction.

Edris, a teacher, also reported how parents often became embarrassed about speaking with the teachers:

There are some people in this area who feel too ashamed to make any contact with us, and they cannot even think of any way of having a conversation with us.

In my journal I reflected about the importance Bangladesh government policy and international research placed on parental engagement and considered how fundamental conversation between the two groups was. I noted that for the continuation of any kind of conversation participation from both sides was essential. However it seemed that parents from this region were not equipped to communicate with the teachers. They seemed to be blocked by their mindfulness of who they were and what they could do. This mindfulness seemed to stem from the reality of their daily experiences and from the social practices of the community they belonged to.

In my interviews I found that parents in the rural region were aware of their illiteracy which made them too embarrassed to face teachers, attend school programmes and supervise children's homework tasks. In the school programmes to which they were invited, teachers would talk about students' educational progress and about what students needed to be doing at home. However, parents were mostly unable to judge their children's performance or progress. They would fail to supervise their children's activities

at home because they were not able to help them with their homework tasks or even know how to support their efforts. Parents appeared to feel helpless, and embarrassed to face teachers because they did not know what their children were meant to be doing and so feared they would not be able to sustain a conversation with the teachers. At the same time, teachers were treated as the learned persons in society. Parents did not feel comfortable about facing situations where they could not reply to the teacher's knowledge.

Perceptions of the value of education

The daily struggle for survival experienced by rural parents would force them to think about the immediacy of their needs. For some it was difficult to form long terms visions about their children's education. To them, education was a long time process and carried an enormous amount of expenses, which tended to make them apprehensive about future plans for their children's study. In studying working children in Bangladesh, Ahsan (2011) found that while it was hard for poor parents to think about the processes of their children's education, they were always forced to consider the current costs of schooling and the current cost of their children's lost opportunity to work. In my study too it was apparent that their children's education could not be at the top of their priorities. Lal Mia shared his thoughts about why he did not have long time vision for his children's learning,

Higher education is so expensive in our country, and I am not able to bear those expenses. At the same time, my son will not be a judge or a barrister. My son is going to school and learning something. That is enough for me.

I reflected that while parents were struggling with their current family survival needs, it would require courage to plan for their children to finish secondary, far less higher, education in order to win a good job.

Ahmad (2003) also found that because of the high costs, both direct costs and costs of lost immediate work opportunity, poor household people in Bangladesh failed to afford to keep their children at school until they completed the secondary level. The same situation does not apply across all classes in Bangladesh. Not only rich people, but also many of those who have been educated or seen the benefits of education within their wider family, have a dream for their children's education, and pay their highest attention to making their continued study possible. For some it is a long struggle and continued sacrifice but they

achieve their children's education and consequent career opportunities. Edris was sharing a similar observation:

There are exceptional parents in our society as well, though the numbers of such parents are limited. We can see, in our society that a few parents are trying to educate their children overcoming their financial struggle. A few parents are getting success in their children education. But some of them failed to continue their children education and had to stop in the middle because of not being able to bear educational expenses.

Moreover, recently, especially after SSC and HSC examinations, there have been headlines in Bangladeshi daily newspapers (such as *The Daily Star*, 2017 May 29) seeking the attention of the richest people in the country and seeking their helping hand for the highly meritorious but poor students. I reflected in my journal that poverty need not always be an insurmountable obstacle, and that it was vital to find ways to help parents see the future benefits of education rather than to leave them focusing on the struggle and expenses.

Education and the possibility of securing a secure job are closely linked. The job market in Bangladesh is very limited; a common saying is that *getting a job is like getting a golden deer* (চাকরি পাওয়া যেন একটা সোনার হরিণ পাওয়ার মতো). The job market is very narrow and, on the other hand, the numbers of job seekers is very high (BBS, 2017). Each year, the number of job opportunities is considerably lower than the number of university graduates (Rahman, 2007). A new organisation, the Centre for Development and Employment Research (CEDR) reported the 2017 educated unemployment rate in Bangladesh and found the highest unemployment rate is in the educated people (*Prothom Alo*, 2017, January 10). On the other hand parents realise they need to send their children to school for getting a certificate before they can get any job in the garment sector, or any fourth class employee job¹. Maruf, a teacher, affirmed:

A certificate is needed to get any job now in our job market. At least a class eight certificate. So, many parents send their children to school up to the level eight to get a certificate. After that they can get a job in the garments sector.

¹ Forth class employees are appointed as support staffs in any organisation in Bangladesh who are assigned to look after the office, cleaning, and attend to any orders from their superiors.

Parents are thus squeezed between the need to provide some education for their children and the realisation that further education may not result in better and secure jobs. I found that some parents in this study would only manage to send their children to school for the minimum amounts of time. Maruf added a further comment:

Some students have developed a regular practice of just attending in the class only before exam time and then sitting for the examination. Their intention is to get promotion to the next class and get a certificate.

The pressure to get a certificate seemed to have taken precedence over any seriousness of study or real intention of learning.

Parents in this study had differing perceptions of education for their daughters. Those who had a daughter in the school seemed to be aware that it would be an advantage for arranging a marriage with a respected family; at least they could say to the family that their daughter is attending the school, and she is literate. Maruf explained:

Some parents send their daughter to the school as a basis for getting any beautiful marriage; no one wants to get marry an illiterate girl.

However, some parents also experienced concerns as a result of educating their daughters. For example, Amzad shared his worry:

My daughter is studying now. It is better to arrange her marriage at this time. I will not wait to finish her education because after two or three years people might not agree to marry my daughter and the rate of dowry would increase.

I reflected that parents did not seem to want to see other aspects of their daughter's ability, to recognise that their educated daughters could play a vital role for the family as well as for society. A common perception in the community is that there is no purpose in education if after getting married their daughter will engage to cook food and taking care of the family members.

These brief accounts reflect the core of what the parents in my study explained they wanted to achieve through their children's education. Parents' and teachers' comments indicated that parents had limited expectations. Added to their own inexperience of formal schooling the limited expectations seemed to reduce parents' perception of need to check on their children's learning, as is further explored in the following section. Parents' life

conditions led them to think first about their immediate and material family needs. In addition, the uncertainty of getting a secure job after higher education tended to discourage them from thinking about their children's education in any terms beyond gaining the necessary minimum certification. I was told about instances in which students from the region failed to continue their higher education because of the difficulty of the parents to bear the expenses and had to come back to the village and become involved in the fathers' works. There were other stories of local youth who failed to help in their fathers' work because they had dreams of further education and so spent their time in ways that local people saw as unproductive. I reflected in my journal that I could understand how, considering those examples, some parents would believe that education for them would be a matter of luxury, and that they did not want to follow false dreams.

Alternatives to talking with teachers

I found that the parents in this study tended to rely on other means than talking to teachers to evaluate children's progress in education. Emdad, a teacher, stated:

I found that some of the parents in our locality who do not visit the school or communicate with us are quite confident about their children's progress when I meet them in the village and talk with them. They rely on what their children say, and they feel relief. So they do not think about their role and contribution they need to make.

I found that parents were pleased that their children were learning something from school and, therefore, they did not seem to feel any need to engage in further discussion about their children's education. For instance, Sabur expressed his expectation from his children as follows:

I never attended the school before for my elder son, though he did very well, and he completed his secondary education in one chance. Now he is pursuing his higher education. So, my younger son will also do the same, like his elder brother. I can rely on him.

I reflected in my journal that there was an element of complacency in this attitude; that, as well as other factors, it was perhaps a lack of vision about the possibilities of education that made parents reluctant to visit the school and communicate with the teachers.

I questioned in my field journal whether the stipend system might make parents feel that if they send their children to school that would be enough. I wondered whether it makes them think that is all the role that need to play and that they have done their job by keeping them away from work and in school. In the recent past the enrolment rate was very low as parents from poorer households did not send their children, especially the girls, to school. To improve the situation the government of Bangladesh introduced the stipend programme in secondary schools. The programme is still continuing, for both boys and girls. I found that parents seemed happy to send their children to school and satisfied that they were receiving a stipend for sending them.

Emdad stated:

Parents do not communicate with us willingly. They think that sending their children to be at a school is enough. Otherwise why would they receive a stipend for that? It is their lack of realisation. They do not have the idea that they, as well as teachers, can support their children's education. They do not even consider it.

He added:

Parents are very relaxed about whether their children are going to school. They believe that they sent their kids to the school and that is enough. They do not care whether their children are really going to school or spending time in another place. They never visit us or communicate with us to know about any progress of their children.

I have already noted that managing the time for communicating with teachers was an obstacle for many parents. Most of the parents were busy working to earn money and provide for their family needs. As I reflected on Emdad's comments, I wondered whether it was the pressure of their daily work and their lack of literacy and of educational experience that made them unable to support to children's learning or whether they were in fact just relaxed to see their children were going to school. Emdad further stated:

When they are illiterate, they are happy enough to see their children are going to school. Because of that, they do not much care for their children's education. They feel proud to just share with others: 'my son is going to school'.

As I developed my reflection I wondered if the difference between my two earlier alternatives was perhaps artificial. In the rural context in Bangladesh parents seemed to be forced to squeeze their expectations about their children's education and be happy with small outcomes. Shahana, another teacher, explained the situation further:

Some parents feel happy to think that while they are illiterate, their children are going to school, and learning how to read and write. They believe that their son is the one from his family who is being educated, and they are happy that their children are not illiterate like them.

Shahana repeated her understanding to give it emphasis:

They do not have that much education. They are struggling to survive and when they can see that their children are going to school, it makes them happy. At least their children are getting literacy. So they can share this achievement with others, that their children are not illiterate like them.

I reflected that Shahana seemed to understand that, based on their own experience and life pressures, parents could not see any positive reason to be involved in education as it was a teachers' responsibility and there was no place where they could practically engage apart from sending their children to school. She also seemed to understand that although many parents were themselves illiterate they did feel proud to see their children were going to school.

As I talked with them I found that some parents fell back on their religious beliefs to assure the educational success of their children. Like several other parents, Sabur expressed his faith:

By the grace of Almighty Allah, my son will pass the exam. Allah is the owner of everything. I am just trying to give some financial support.

One again I questioned in my journal whether the belief was a way of parents avoiding any responsibility to interfere with their children's study habits, or whether it was recognition that they did not have the capacity to do any more than make sure school fees were paid.

Talking with various parents, it became evident that parents were happy with the enrolment of their children and with them getting promotion to the next class every year. I

noted that there were no statements of vision that including things like that one day their children would become a learned person and would get involved in the development projects for the country. I began to appreciate that parents had no personal experience that would lead them to think about creating development projects. I began to think it was perhaps inevitable that they would have limited expectations for their children's education: attendance at school would lead to adequate learning. They expected their children to engage with schooling, not them. Lal Mia articulated his satisfaction with the process in this way:

I can see my son is going to school. No different issues created here. What more? I am sending my child to the school, and he is going to school. So, he is learning something.

Some parents I talked with considered engagement would only need to occur if their children would do something wrong and they would receive a complaint from the teachers. Without getting any complaint from the teachers, parents did not feel any need to make contact. I heard this attitude being interpreted as the absence of complaints from the teachers about their children meant their children were doing well with their education. Sabur expressed his confidence in the progress of his son:

If my son does anything wrong, it will come to my ear somehow. Then I can take my further step. Without any complaint, what can I do?"

Like some other parents I talked with, Sabur did not see any reason to seek information from the teachers. He evaluated his son's performance by the lack of any objection from the teachers. He said:

Maybe my son is doing well, and that is why teachers are not complaining to me. When everything is fine, then I do not need to go to school.

I found that when parents did not receive any complaints, they assumed that everything was going well and that their children were doing well. Parents seemed to consider that communication with teachers was only about responding to any complaints from the teachers.

I found that many parents tended to also define *meritorious* in terms of absence of complaints. Lal Mia described his son in this way:

My son is meritorious because he does not get involved with bad things, does not quarrelled or argue with anyone and is going to school.

In reflecting on these comments in my field journal, I wondered about the relationship between parents' simple expectations for their children's education and their avoidance of engagement with teachers and the school. I also wondered about the extent they relied on teachers to ensure their children were making good progress. I further explore that reliance in the following sections.

The problem with respect

Conversation with both teachers and parents identified the respected position teachers hold within the community. Lal Mia explained in this way:

Teachers are *Shikkha Guru*¹. They teach everyone education, etiquette. That why I always feel scared to talk to them, in case I do any wrong. I entrusted my son to the teachers. They will do everything, whatever they need for my children's education. I am only concerned about if they misbehave in any way.

Lal Mia's words put teachers on a pedestal, and throughout the community parents demonstrated their high respect for teachers. I reflected that the respect was very nice and probably deserved, but it signposted a significant gap between the groups. Respect seemed to be creating a distance between them and they were missing opportunities to work together for children's education. As well as respect for the teachers' work the gap seemed to be about the intellectual difference between teachers and parents. In most cases both parents and teachers were living within the same area: some of them were living as neighbours. However, there was an invisible divide between them. Parents seemed to look at teachers as if they were different kinds of people, and therefore they sometimes did not feel comfortable talking to the teachers about aspects of their children's education. At times, with some parents, it became a kind of fear.

During my fieldwork, I became increasingly aware of the way parents' lifestyle, standard of living, educational background, and financial conditions created a sense of difference from teachers who were clearly identified as educated people. The sense of difference was evident when Lal Mia talked about his initial hesitation in speaking to me:

¹ People use the term *shikkha guru* to refer to their teacher.

I am an illiterate person. I came to you (*indicating me*) and I was feeling a kind of fear about talking to you. I do not have the etiquette to speak to a learned person like you. As I never been to school, even in the corridor. I may do anything wrong.

He added:

The teachers who are appointed in our school are literate and qualified for the post and they are more qualified than me about my children's education.

Amzad expressed a similar attitude:

I am illiterate, on the other hand, they are literate, and that is why I cannot go to that type of environment in the school. I cannot say anything to them.

As I listened to these parents I began to understand that parents did not think about what their children were doing in school or about the homework tasks they had to do at home; they considered their only duty was to send their children to school. Then the responsibility was the teachers' and they anticipated the teachers' contribution to their children's education. I reflected that it showed that many parents had a high degree of confidence in the school, and they felt relief to think that they were sending their children to an excellent institution.

Moshiur, a teacher, perceived that confidence differently He suggested:

Some parents are apathetic. They feel comfort to think that they are sending their children to a good school, so their children will receive a better education from there.

I noted the difference of perspectives in my field journal. At one level it highlighted the gap between teachers and parents. At another level it provoked me to think further about the relationship between respect and apathy. This is further discussed at the end of this chapter

I found that for some parents respect took the form of some kind of claim: some parents perceived teachers as *their person*. Often both parents and teachers came from the same region. When non-government secondary schools are established in an area, head teachers and SMCs target potential teachers from the locality to serve the community. As a result a

good proportion of teachers are local people and teachers and parents know each other. They also meet each other in the community as they go about their regular activities. I wondered if that was a further reason for parents to not particularly want to meet with the teachers in the school in a formal way.

Minhaj, a teacher, told me he used to talk with the parents whenever he happens to meet them. Mostly the conversation would be about various local issues, but if the meeting occurred after any parent related school programme, he would usually ask why they had not attended. Minhaj told me that one day he was returning his house from school by a van and a parent was the driver. He was asking the parent why he had not attended the school programme. He told me the parent replied, with a smile:

Sir, you are our people, and you are there for taking care of my son. I am hopeful you people will look after my children. Please do not drag me into this case and let me stay in my way.

Another teacher, Javed told me he too had asked parents why they did not attend school programmes. He told me of a parent's reply:

All of you are our people when you are there at school. What else we can say? You are more knowledgeable than us. Please look after my son.

Javed added:

This is how parents transfer their responsibilities to us, teachers. I think they are skilled enough in this regard.

I reflected in my field journal that the respect with which parents regarded teachers was somehow linked with a claim of possessiveness and reliance, that there was a kind of bonding as well as a gap. There were relationships between parents and teachers that were sometimes blood connections, neighbourhood familiarities and friendships from childhood, as well as regular encounters in the mosque and other community places. These relationships, as much as respect, seemed to allow parents to pass over their responsibilities to the school. Mojib, a parent, told me:

One of my nephews is a teacher at the school where my children are attending for their study. He knows about my children. He is enough for taking care of them.

Better than me. I can rely on him. When we do chat, we chat for different purposes.

As I transcribed these comments from parents and teachers I began to realise that the fear parents had about talking to teachers about their children's education did not necessarily extend to a fear about everyday exchanges. Many parents, especially those who were a little better off economically, seemed to be on good terms with teachers. One of the teachers, Minhaj, later made a similar observation. He commented that there was little practice in the region of parents visiting the school for getting updated about their children's progress, but, he said, that did not mean that all parents were careless. He explained:

There are some parents here in our locality who are running their business, local leaders handling various social situations, playing an active role in the society, even contributing their effort for school development. However, they are not visiting the school for getting any information about their children.

A similar kind of comment was made by a parent, Jahurul. Jahurul introduced the head teacher of the school where his son was studying as his friend. He told me that he would sometimes visit the school to meet with him, but he did not go there to know about his son's performance. He explained that he had opportunity to ask about it but he did not. He said:

The head teacher never tells me anything wrong about my son, and I believe he will inform me if he will hear anything wrong about my son.

Over time I noted that there were other parents in the district who, like Jahurul, would visit the school and meet with a teacher at various times, but they would visit with different purposes than to enquire about their child. They would visit the school, meet with the head teacher in his room, chat and have tea, but the purpose of the visit would be social or political not educational. Adil, who has a business near the school where his children were studying, told me about his visits to the school:

I visit the school every now and again because my business is very near at this school and I have a good rapport with the teachers. I used to visit the school when some problems occurred and sometimes just for spending time with the teachers,

mainly the head teacher. However, at the time of my visit the topic of my children's performance very rarely comes up.

I found that the dependency that goes with family ties also brought complications. When I interviewed Selina, Emdad was with me. Selina said she was trying to get Emdad, who she addressed as *Mama* [Uncle], to tell her about her child's performance but was not getting Emdad to talk. Emdad seemed unwilling to take responsibility. He said:

Please discuss with the other teachers as well because I only teach one subject to your son. I do not have any idea of the other disciplines so you need to communicate with the other teachers for knowing about the overall performance of your child.

However, I learned that Selina felt she had little choice but to rely on the familiarity that comes with family ties. Within the rural region social practice and some family's customs make it hard for a wife to go outside the house alone and talk with other people. Selina had that kind of problem in her life. She was a housewife, and her husband was working abroad. She told me:

His (*showing her son*) father does not like it if I go outside. Usually, I go outside to the bank for receiving money when my husband sends it to me, and it happens once in a month. Though he does not like this, I do not have alternate options.

She was alone and had sole responsible for taking care of her children and communicating with the teachers, but she was not allowed to do that, as her husband had instructed her to communicate only with Mama (Emdad). So she would try to find him and press him for information about her son's performance. As I learned her story and saw the way it seemed to make Emdad uncomfortable, I realised there were still further layers of complexity in the social relationships that made communication between school and parents difficult.

Parents' high expectations of teachers

As I continued my interviews I found the issue of expectations increasingly complex. Teachers expected parents to take an active interest in their children's educational progress and to come to school on days that had been arranged for communication with them. Most parents I talked with could not meet those expectations because of work pressures, illiteracy or a sense of social inadequacy or a combination of all three factors. On the other

hand, parents expected teachers to take full responsibility for their children's learning, and sometime for their social behaviour, and teachers seemed to find those expectations unrealistic and sometimes embarrassing.

Emdad expressed his frustration as follows:

Parents' expectations are all teacher centred. Parents desire that teachers be more than enough for taking care of their children's educational needs. They have decided and are firm in insisting that they are not able to do anything because they do not have education themselves. Parents accept it as a truth that the teacher will do whatever is needed for their children's education.

Emdad added:

Parents do not have any inclination to do something for their children's educational activities. They are stuck with their strong perception that we teachers are here at school to look after their children's education, and we are the only ones who are responsible to do that job.

I learned that parents believed that teachers were recruited for teaching their children and were getting a salary to do it. Several parents communicated attitudes that matched Emdad's description. They maintained that teachers were there to provide education and their efforts should be more than enough; parents did not need to contribute anything. For example, Amzad explained:

Thinking about my children's education is not something that I can do. Trying to do something with my children's education seems inappropriate to me. What do I need to do and what can I do for my children's education? It is the teachers' job and let them do it. I hope teachers are playing their role, and will be doing their job for the benefit of my children as well.

I reflected in my field journal that not only did parents feel unable to work with their children's education but they also defined the teachers' role as one that was separate from theirs and autonomous. I thought they perhaps defined jobs and responsibilities from their experience within their community: they could see various peoples involved with different jobs and no one interfered with anyone else's work. In this way the teacher would be responsible for their job and parents would not have anything to do the teachers' job. Within this kind of understanding of roles, parents would not want to appear to question to

the teachers' capability of providing for their children's education. I noted in my journal that asking about progress might constitute such a questioning. So it seemed that parents did not want to talk with the teachers about the school activities not only because they did not feel educationally equipped to do so, but also because believed education was the teachers' job. They expected teachers to provide a good education for their children.

I found that besides relying on the teachers, some parents had a similar tendency to rely on the School Management Committee (SMC). The SMC is responsible for looking after the overall activities of a school. This committee is formed through a competitive election process. Parents elect a member of SMC to represent them. Some parents I talked with perceived engagement as looking into overall school activities, and asserted that they were not responsible for those kinds of activities. Emdad reported that from his observation parents relied on the SMC, because they were supposed to represent parents. Parents considered the SMC was elected for that purpose, he said, and their managerial expertise would ensure the school would run in an efficient way and their children would learn and gain good results.

I heard similar views from parents. Amzad said:

I am a parent. A few days ago the SMC election was held. I voted in that election and I think I handed over 60% of my responsibilities to that committee and kept the rest for myself. I nominated them for looking after all activities, to check whether the school is doing right or wrong. And I hope they will carry out their responsibilities.

I learned that parents' willingness to rely on teachers extended to developing their children moral values as well. Afsar, a teacher, told me that from his experience when any student did something wrong and a teacher would ask parents to come and talk about the issue, the reaction would be defensive. He told me that parents would try to make teachers feel they were responsible for the behaviour of their children. He told me that when any student did anything unethical in the school or outside the school, like eve-teasing, smoking or misbehaving with anyone, teachers would tend to get blamed by the parents. Parents would tend to interpret those faults as results of teachers' deficiency, he said. Another teacher, Moshiur, reported a similar process of blaming the teacher:

We faced the problem when any student failed to get the promotion to the next class. Parents would come to school and force us to allow those failed students into the next class. They claimed that it was not their doing that their children has been unable to get the promotion. Parents blamed us for their children's results.

Whereas I found most parents were content to simply rely on teachers for their children's education, I was told that a few parents adopted a more negative response to schools' invitations. Afsar said:

Some parents tried to understand us in a different way. They claimed that why we invite them is because we need their help and they questioned what we are doing in the school. They discussed such thing among themselves.

I was not in a position within my project to find out if such comments were merely casual gossip or more serious complaints. However, Afsar's statement reinforced my understanding that most parents in this rural community saw education as the school's business and that they saw that business as one they were not able to engage in themselves.

Further discussion of emerging themes

Throughout the chapter I have identified a number of themes that emerged from my interviews and discussions with parents and teachers. Here I discuss them further and examine some of the complex ways they interrelate. I also question whether there is any existing basis within rural communities for parental engagement with schools.

Rural poverty and illiteracy

There were a number of issues discussed that speak strongly of the impact of rural poverty.

Illiteracy was identified by both teachers and parents as a reason why parents did not seem to take active interest in the education. The history of education in Bangladesh reveals that the great majority of this generation of rural parents did not experience of education themselves and of those who did few would have had the opportunity to continue beyond primary schooling. Illiteracy was seen by my participants to prevent parents from being able to interact with children's homework and to cause a sense of shame when it came to talking about education in any way. The world of schooling was considered to be outside

the reach of illiterate people. Some parents described it as being in the hands of the Almighty.

Coupled with illiteracy was the lack of direct experience of education. Parents who had not had the opportunity to go to school themselves felt a sense of inadequacy in talking about education and had no bases for understanding what was involved in the processes of school learning. For many, the simple process of going to school was enough to ensure the gaining of enough education to gain the necessary certificates for future employment. This kind of perspective is perhaps reinforced by the current practices of rote learning in schools and national emphasis, by parents, schools and private coaching centres, on examination passes and the consequent dominance of examination over the broader learning goals outlined in curriculum policy (Alam, 2016; Amin, 2017).

Parents also talked about the heavy pressure of their work that prevented them paying attention to their children's schooling and led them to rely on teachers. Many also stated that going to school for a meeting or to attend a programme would cost them the earnings of a day's work and they could not afford that loss.

Differences in cultural capital

As well as creating the material imperatives of rural poverty these factors point to differences in what might be called *cultural capital*. Bourdieu (1984), Bernstein (1990) and many recent educational theorists (Liu, 2016; Reay, 2004; Lareau, 2000, 1987) discuss the concept of cultural capital in terms of the resources, embodied, objectified and institutionalised, that give an individual potential power within a community. Such embodied cultural capital resources include the forms of knowledge, attitudes and styles of behaviour and speech held by individuals. Objectified cultural capital resources include material possessions, status of an individual's job, and the overt manifestations of social class. These become institutionalised according to the way society measures the social capital accrued, particularly in terms of the status allocated to qualifications and to professional roles.

In my study illiteracy, personal inexperience of schooling, low paid labouring jobs and survival living conditions could readily be interpreted as deficits in cultural capital and it was clear that many of my participants saw them as personal *lackings*. Their lack of the kind of cultural capital that seemed valued by schools made parents avoid meetings with

teachers or at least avoid discussion of educational matters with teachers. At the same time, the cultural capital that parents did possess, knowledge of the land and its cultivation, of fishing, or small business development and management of survival budgeting, seemed to have no place within the education processes of the school. This raises the question of how the forms of knowledge that are local and have been well developed in the community could be better drawn on by schools and whether the utilisation of local knowledge would make parents more confident in contributing to their children's education.

However, in this study, the difference in cultural capital did not seem to come because of differences in social backgrounds of teachers and students' families because in many cases parents and teachers had grown up in the same community, continued to be neighbours and sometimes were direct blood relatives. Moreover, the accounts of parents who talked about visiting the school for other purposes than to discuss their children's education suggest that these parents at least shared important forms of cultural capital with the teachers. It seems, therefore, that while differences in cultural capital are significant factors in defining the relationship between teachers and parents, they are not a sufficient explanation of why parents avoided engagement in education.

Other social forces were also evident in my study. One was that some parents were afraid that other members of the community would mock them if they were seen going to the school to talk to teachers: it seemed they were afraid of appearing pretensions and trying to reach above their social status. Closely aligned to this, some parents considered that they would only want to talk to teachers if their child achieved something special so they could go to the school with 'a big face'. Conforming to the expectations of the community played a significant part in determining parents' actions.

Another influential social force was attitude to the role of girls and women. Parents I talked with tended to see a definite but limited potential to the education of girls. An educated girl had good marriage prospects but an extended education could make a girl too old to be an attractive bride and so could involve greater dowry costs. Selina's story highlighted that in many cases rural families still saw the place of a woman as inside the home, and this made it more difficult for women, who might be more free from the pressures of income earning work, to discuss their children's education with teachers. This issue is further discussed in the following chapter.

The elevated status of teachers seemed to come not only from their specific cultural capital or their socio-economic standing but rather from a traditional reverence for the role of teacher. I discuss the effects of this status a little later. Here I want to make the point that this status is socially constructed and deeply ingrained in the attitudes of Bangladeshi people.

A cautious sense of family progress

It was evident from interviews and conversations with parents that most of them had a sense of satisfaction and even pride that their children were going to school and would not only be literate but would earn a certificate showing they had completed junior secondary education (class XIII), which is a minimum requirement for getting a job. For a generation to whom general access education was a new government initiative it was a significant thing that their children could stay at school long enough to graduate with a certificate. Parents not only boasted about it, they also pointed out that they contributed financially, by paying the necessary fees and by withholding their children from the family pool of labour. On the other hand, some teachers suggested that the drawing of the stipend was a primary source of motivation for parents to send their children to school for secondary education. Perhaps both sources of motivation were significant.

It was also evident that many parents were unsure about the value of education beyond the level of junior secondary school. The job market in Bangladesh for university graduates is known to be notoriously competitive, and parents tended to consider that further expenditure on education was too risky. It is also noteworthy that teachers reported that numbers of students would only attend school long enough to be allowed to take the examination and gain their certificate. So it appears that education held a definite nominal value for parents, but that it was not necessarily connected to any specific details of learning. From parents' perspective the *fact* of education was well taken care of by the school itself, and the content was something they did not feel equipped to examine or contribute to.

Respect, responsibility, dependency and withdrawal

The respect that parents accorded teachers was discussed in various ways by both parents and teachers. It was evident from participants' comments that respect was a multi-faceted matter. The position of teacher itself carries respect in Bangladesh society, but that respect, at national level, is not translated into a realistic living salary (Toaha, 2014; Asadullah, 2006) or into potential for adapting curriculum into locally relevant content (Farooqui, 2014). Moreover, while the parents in my study respected the teachers that respect did not lead them to respond to their requests to attend school meetings.

Respect, as it appeared in this study, seemed to be related to a confident dependency that teachers would take care of all aspects of education. Parents seemed to perceive teachers as the key people to develop their children's learning, social values and manners. It seemed that parents considered that they handed over their children to the school and from the school they would receive everything needed for their life and position within their community.

I wondered whether an intergenerational distance was thus developing and children were missing out on the learning they would have received, in previous generations, from their family. In an earlier time a child would have been taught from their parents, grandparents, uncles and senior brothers to become part of the society. As parents in this study surrendered responsibility for education to the school, perhaps students were missing support from the seniors of their family. It seemed families expected school to teach their children social and moral values as well as prepare them for examinations. At the same time parents were not finding time to spend with their children because of their heavy workloads, whereas in a previous generation the children would in many cases have worked alongside their parents. I wondered if a vacuum was developing in students' social learning and if this might not be leading to their involvement in the various socially harmful activities which are reported in the next chapter.

It was evident from teachers' statements that they did not always like the dependency that was placed on them in the name of trust and respect. I reflected that class sizes are large in rural schools as well as urban ones, with eighty to a hundred students in a class being

normal (Rasheed, 2011; Salahuddin, 2016), and that rural teachers often complained that it was difficult to adapt what they learned in formal training sessions to resources in their schools and needs of the students (Alam, 2016; Amin, 2017). Rural teachers are not resourced to take the weight of the responsibilities that my study suggested are being placed on them. It seemed to me that the pedestal of respect had a heavy price.

Any basis for engagement?

The above discussion seems to suggest that there is too great a gap between the goals of schooling and the expectations and experience of rural parents to allow any kind of effective engagement about students' learning. Perhaps the gap is an inevitable consequence of the rapid and extensive educational change that is being initiated in Bangladesh. Policy asks for parental engagement, but perhaps the deployment of resources to teach parents and schools, rural and urban, *how* to engage is not yet seen as a high priority. Moreover, until there are recorded cases of active engagement between parents and schools within Bangladesh, there are no models to follow. It is noteworthy that this is not a problem that exists in Bangladesh alone. Writing in Australia, Bottrell and Goodwin (2011, p. 2) observed that "there is a dearth of literature on how relationships between teachers and schools and communities may be effectively developed sustained and directed towards redressing educational and social disadvantage".

Nevertheless, as a substantial body of research has recorded, both parents and teachers have important roles to play in children's learning. Common sense also suggests that effective reform of education cannot happen in a country if it is not supported by parents and the wider community. So, despite the obstacles and the difficulties, it seems necessary to find ways to develop communication, involvement, and purposeful engagement.

The next chapter examines some of the young people's problems in the rural community of my study that show the importance of collaboration between school and home and reports participants' suggestions of ways communication could be facilitated. The following chapter reports to the case of a head teacher who developed a personal strategy of engaging parents in their children's learning.

Chapter Seven: Why engagement is needed, and how it might happen

In this age, students are very curious about everything. They get involved in different unsocial activities.

Still I can realise the gap between both teacher and parents, and we are blaming each other. Without filling the gap, expecting a response from the parents will not be possible.

(Local voices)

The previous two chapters reported a lack of engagement of rural parents in their children's schooling, gaps in experience and understanding of education between parents and teachers and the range of socio-cultural and economic factors that appear to block parental engagement. This chapter reports problems in schooling and young people's social behaviour that, despite the acknowledged difficulties, make communication and collaboration between schools and parents important. Firstly it reports teachers' difficulties with meeting the needs of all students and their need for support from parents. Then it examines problems of absenteeism, dropping out, early marriage, and social misbehaviour. Next it examines the reasons for the costs involved in private tuition. Finally, it reports suggestions made at a meeting of teachers and parents for developing processes that will lead to better communication and possible collaboration. In this way it somewhat follows the progress of our group discussions. In those discussion participants' consciousness seems to evolve as they first put forward an almost overwhelming platform of problems and then, perhaps through the process of listening to each other, began almost spontaneously to search for ways to resolve the gaps between them.

Limited scope for teachers to reach all students

Several teachers from this study discussed the difficulties they experienced in finishing their syllabus within the academic year and preparing students for the examination. Maruf stated:

You (*indicating me*) can have a look our academic calendar, where you could see that we spend most of the time on holidays, internal examinations and celebrating different formalities of school programmes.

Didar Hossain added:

In one academic year, we get a few months for teaching our students in the class, and our school remains closed in different occasions and we also get busy with the examination. Within this short period, we cannot get enough time to finish our syllabus.

As part of my document review, I examined the school academic year plan prescribed by the Ministry of Education. The school year in Bangladesh starts in January and ends in December. There are two types of holiday lists in the calendar, one for the government and autonomous officials, and another for educational institutions. The school calendar offers more holidays than the normal calendar. According to the government list, in 2017 there are 85 days allocated for different holidays, 28 days were reserved for two exams and a further 14 days for test examinations for SSC candidates. In addition schools organise winter and summer school annual sports. Rashid (2016) reported that teachers found the time constraint made it impossible for them to complete their whole syllabus.

The problem is augmented by the mismatch between the curriculum and the existing examination system, as has been detailed in Chapter Two. So teachers feel pressure to cover the syllabus quickly so that they can give time to prepare students for the examination. Rasheed (2011) described how teachers in another region focused on superficially finishing all the mandated topics and overlooked real learning in the classroom.

Moreover in Bangladesh flooding affects many areas and closes schools for extended periods, as detailed in Chapter Two. The area where this study takes place is situated on the bank of the river Jamuna. Teachers in the area described the huge problem that floods create for their teaching. For instance, Moshiur said:

During the time of the flood, the school is affected very badly. It overflows the school premises, even comes into the classroom. That hampers our school activities, and the school remains closed. At the same time, students cannot get to

school because the routes have been flooded. We cannot overcome the time lost during the flood.

Rashid (2016) reported that at best teachers get six months for completing the syllabus, and that they find they are unable to do so.

Teachers repeatedly explained that they had limited opportunities to focus on teaching and learning in school time. On the one hand they had limited time for teaching in class and on the other hand they had limited scope for making sessions effective for all students. Javed stated:

I am responsible for finishing my syllabus within the time frame to a large number of students in one classroom. I do not get enough time to repeat my lesson for the second time. Limited time for one session also does not allow for repeating any information a second time; I need to finish my session on time. In the large classroom among the various types of students, some of them fail to understand the lesson in a proper way.

Like other teachers, Javed felt the pressure of his obligation to complete the whole syllabus in one academic year even though there was not enough time to do so thoroughly. Because of his liability to finish the syllabus, he considered that he could not afford the time to return to any concept and explain it further. He also considered that it was impossible to meet the needs of all the large number of students in the class. Rasheed's research (2011) also found that the large number of students in a classroom did not allow teachers to conduct their sessions in ways that enabled all students to follow the lesson.

Emdad explained the consequence of time limitations:

Students need to learn about each subject related topic and to memorise some of the items for their exam, but it not possible for us to help them in class for remembering. So, in order to remember any topic of a subject, students need to study at home. There is no any other alternative.

He further explained that he would try to present each topic in class in an explicit way so that students could revise the topic in their own time and so understand it. I observed that teachers would deliver their lectures in the classroom and students would pay attention and

take notes. The teachers would identify some topics to memorise at home. Thus it seemed that independent practice after school hours was essential for students.

Emdad told me that he did realise that some of his students were not getting the full idea of a lesson:

Some of my students can understand any topic when I conduct the session, but some other kinds of students do not get the full idea of that topic. They would need to have it repeated a second or third time for getting a complete idea.

Research by Alam (2016) reported how students in his study described their learning difficulties. Some explained that they thought they understood things in the classroom when the teacher explained them, but no longer understood them when they came home. He also reported how the teachers in his study initially thought they could not meet the needs of all. Like Emdad, other teachers acknowledged that they did not get time to repeat the topic a second time in the class for students who failed to understand. The result was that some would not get a clear idea of any topic and did not spend more time at home to try and understand it, and would in time become demotivated about attending school. Those students would not feel comfortable and would lose their courage to participate. Emdad described his experience:

Students' absenteeism increases when they do not understand any topic from the lesson. They lose interest to attend school. Attending school was not creating any meaning for them, and sometimes they would end up by dropping out.

Shahana also reported that she had students with various kinds of capability in her class, and they had various demands, problems and expectations. She did not think she could fulfil every student's expectations. She described the problem:

I found different students in the classroom. Some students can understand my lesson from the first attempt of my lecture, but some cannot, and they need some extra time and care. But limited time does not permit me to repeat the session second time.

Nasir Uddin talked with some distress about the quality of students in his school:

The majority of students are not serious enough about their study and their parents are not strict enough about their children's education. Students need to spend more

time with study at home, and, for this reason, the parents need to keep their eyes on their activities.

Nasir added:

We try to prepare our students to pass the exam. Getting good results from these students is beyond imagination. If students would spend time studying at home and could get support from the parents, then good results would be possible.

The domination of public examinations in Bangladesh forces teachers to concentrate on trying to ensure their students pass the examination. However, teachers complained they were unable to give enough time in class to prepare students. For that reason, they emphasised that students needed to spend time on self-directed study and they hoped for support from parents at home.

Equal importance of parents and teachers

At the same time as they emphasised the importance of study at home and of parental support, the teachers in the study stated that they missed parental support. They complained that parents did not care enough about their children's education. Edris said:

Students are staying under the teacher's shade for a short period and for a much longer time under their parents. Therefore, students' activities in the school and at home are equally important for their better learning.

Other teachers in the study also argued that students spent more time at home than at school and so time with parents at home was necessary for their study. Iftekhar said:

Teachers can play their role only seven hours in a day, and the rest of the time students stay under parents' supervision - which is nearly seventeen hours.

A common comment from the teachers was that although teachers were responsible for supervising the students during their whole period in the school, they were not able to focus on individual students. On the other hand, they considered, parents would get more chance to attend to their own children.

Moreover teachers explained that they had no time to give to individual students because of the pressure of busy schedules and home responsibilities. Edris stated:

It became very tough for me to manage all my classes and other school activities. After doing all my assigned work, I do not get time to think of the individual student's problems. After school, I have my family to spend time with them.

Maruf added:

Besides teaching in the classroom, we need to engage with different government works, organise various school functions, evaluate our internal and public examination papers, and such workload does not allow me to focus individual students' progress and after school care.

In discussion teachers affirmed that they did have any room for observing students after school hours. Sometimes, they acknowledged, they could not fully monitor student activities within the school premises because of the enormous number of students in the school. Minhaj shared his experience of dealing with 85 students in one classroom. Students did not get the chance to sit comfortably in the classroom, and there was no room to swing a cat in. He recognised that he had trouble making any topic understandable to all students in the class. He stated:

All students in my class are teenagers in the classroom; they all try to show their different attitudes rather than listen to me. After managing them, I try to present the topic in such way so that they can continue and can go through it in their way at home. The overall situation does not allow me to teach individually; sometimes I do not get the chance for movement in the class because of the number of students.

I reflected in my field journal about teachers' sense of powerlessness in such classroom conditions. Teachers do need to control the students and if they are kept busy keeping students in order, they would get little time to use in making a topic comprehensible. At the same time the big number of students in a classroom makes it hard for teachers to show their interest in each student. I reflected that from teachers' point of view it made perfect sense to expect parents to ensure their children were spending their time at home studying.

Limited parental attention

Some teachers pointed out that parents were not paying attention to their children's activities after leaving school and so were not checking if they were studying at home. Conversations with parents and teachers and my own observation revealed that after returning from school, students normally played in the field or spent time with other young people within their region. When they finished their game, they were supposed to return to their house and spend time on study. However, I found they did not return home early, they would spend their time randomly, moving about from one place to another, and get involved in various activities within their village.

Teachers' reported that in the evenings students would watch television in the various tea stalls where other and older village people would gather to watch movies and chat, and this would continue till ten or eleven in the evening, which is late in the rural context. I found that this was so when I walked through different places in the evening. Girls would stay at home and watch TV programmes either in their house or in a neighbour's house. Several times when I was in the field I saw groups of boys watching TV in the tea stalls, carrying on gossip within a small group here and there. Abul Hossain described the situation:

People from our community usually spend their free time in the tea stall where they watch different Bangla movies, football or cricket matches, political gossip and other things. This place is kind of recreation centre for the labouring people after their work. Every tea stall owner has a television for attracting people, as it increases the number of cups of tea. Students normally join those places.

Didar Hossain added:

I can see my students are spending their time outside at the tea stall and watching TV at night. Sometimes I turn up there and then they leave the place. It is not possible for me to monitor them every day if their parents do not interrupt to do so.

A few parents acknowledged that they had their little control over their children's movements or activities. Edris shared his understanding of parental helplessness in this way:

Parents are helpless with their children. The children do not follow their fathers' command, although parents hardly interrupt their children's interests, especially about educational matters, because of their illiteracy.

A similar statement comes out from Julhash, a parent, who said:

I do not have control of my son; my son does not follow my command. Whenever I tell my son to go right, he goes left. That is why I do not try to say anything to him.

I learned that the reality in the context was that parents would hardly ever interfere with their children's activities, and their busy schedules did not allow them to get involved. Another parent, Sabur, told me:

Every day I return in the evening from my hard work, feel tired, and do not get that head space to check on my children activities. At the same time, my lack of institutional knowledge also does not help to talk with them about study matters.

Researchers, such as Harris and Goodall (2008), have found that parental engagement in their children's learning at home setting has a positive impact on their learning. They acknowledge, however, that the nature of the engagement may vary according to context. Statements from the participants in my study and my own observation suggested that many rural parents were not engaging with their children's learning at home. Teachers stated that the absence of such engagement had impact on students' outcomes. Teachers suggested that parents sometimes validated their children's neglect of their study rather than playing a supporting role. The following sections examine areas where it was perceived that lack of parental concern was creating problems.

Students' attendance

Several teachers talked about how irregularity in students' attendance hampers their learning. They explained that sequencing in any lesson is important for understanding, and when absentee students returned after two or three days they would be completely lost. Maruf said:

As a result of students' irregularity they are staying in the race behind any lesson; sometimes it becomes problematic for me when I conduct the classroom. I can see

irregular students failed to interact and receive the lesson that I discuss, because of lack of the previous lecture. Students' irregularity creates a gap in their learning.

Teachers talked about the stress created by students whose attendance was irregular. There was different one who was absent every day. There was, they said, no chance to repeat the class for them and they could not offer them any extra care. Edris stated:

Students' absenteeism is adding additional difficulties to finish the syllabus, especially those who are irregular in our school. They are finishing the year with incomplete learning.

Edris expressed the problem that he faced from student absentees in this way:

I could not finish the whole chapter within one day. For finishing one chapter I need three or four lessons, depending on the length of the section. When a student does not attend a lesson, then they cannot understand the next lesson, because they do not have any idea of the previous lesson. Those students do not get the chance for recovering the sections that they missed.

School authorities try to stop absenteeism by imposing a penalty, and some teachers across the country have used physical punishment to try to halt absenteeism. In Chapter Five, I discussed the penalty issue. However, the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2010a) has circulated an order to stop physical punishment in schools, and asked for local government officers to take action against teachers who used it.

Discussion with teachers in this study indicated that the imposition of penalties does not improve the absentee situation. Iftekhar explained:

We charged a nominal amount as a penalty for students' absenteeism and students somehow managed the amount.

He added:

This scenario will not change until we get the support and co-operation of parents.

Teachers alleged that sometimes parents caused student's absenteeism from school. While students' absenteeism occurs regularly in this region, it increases radically at harvesting time which is usually at the time of May and June. During this period students' participation rate drops to a minimum level. Didar stated that during this season:

In an average of among 85 to 90 students in one class, it comes down to 15 to 20 students.

Tahmina shared her experience that during the harvesting season teachers would struggle to run their school activities smoothly because of heavy and irregular absentee rates. Other teachers also observed that during the harvesting period boys would go with their parents to the field and help their father cultivate the land, and girls would help their mother at home to process the crops. Several teachers explained that during the harvesting time the demand for labour increased with a high pay rate and that influenced parents to involve their children in work. Shahana described the situation:

At the harvesting time the actual demand of labour increases, parents usually involve their children in work for earning extra money. Landowners ask parents to involve their children to minimise the need for outside labour.

In addition, some students would go with their fathers to different districts to earn money for their family. Parents tended to consider this as a peak time for earning money and allowing them to save some for rest of the year. The time of demand was an opportunity for them, and they needed to utilise the opportunity as best as they could. Emdad shared his perception of the reality of this situation:

During the harvesting time, some families from here go to Sylhet district for employment with their sons, sometimes with their whole family. After finishing their work, they return home with cash and crops as their wages. At that time students cannot attend school.

I witnessed the scenario while I was in the field. I saw family members were returning from work by boat with a full load of paddy. The process of migration for seasonal work occurs in many rural parts of Bangladesh. Asaduzzaman (2013) reported the level of the poverty in another district and their seasonal migration for seeking jobs in different areas.

Besides that, I learned from parents and teachers that it was common practice for students to help parents who were working with heavy loads; either they would drive or help while their parents are driving. Shahana explained:

Students usually help their fathers in the *haat* day (হাট বার) [weekly bazaar] and especially on bazaar day when fathers drive their van carrying heavy goods and their children typically push from the back.

Parents also reported that they sent their children to work when they felt helpless and were struggling with family expenses and could not afford additional educational expenses. Some parents did not consider educational expenses as basic family needs. Lal Mia stated:

I always struggled to meet up my family basic needs, like food, clothes and medical expenses. I cannot think about educational expenses before fulfilling those basic needs. Educational expenses always come after.

Parents would send their children to work on a day basis if someone asked for support. Lal Mia explained that his daily income was 150 to 200 taka per day, and he was the only earning member of the family. That amount of salary was insufficient for his family and so he needed to send his son to make extra money for his family. He said:

Sometimes I send my son for work, but not every day. When my job giver needs additional support and asks for my son, then I bring him to that work. His little contribution has helped my family a lot.

Several teachers informed me that when students supported their parents by working it had a double impact: they were missing lessons, and some of them would become sick and could not concentrate on study.

At harvesting time teachers found they were spending a relatively lazy time at school. Sometimes the school would close early. Emdad stated:

During the harvesting time we do not have anything to do in the school. It becomes very tough for us to do anything effective. In that situation, we decide to close our school and utilise the rest of the day for our family needs. Truly speaking, we take the opportunity. But this time impacts on our whole academic period, and we cannot cover our syllabus in the rest of the time.

In our group discussion teachers expressed the hope that co-ordinated social action could play a positive role in changing the situation. They suggested that community people,

teachers and parents can take various initiatives to stop the employment of school-going students and give them space for attending school.

Several teachers identified absenteeism as a cause of dropping out from school. Didar Hossain pointed to the effect of educational expenses on parental thinking:

When a parent can see that he does not need to pay educational expenses and on the contrary his son is contributing his family and he is getting relief from financial pressure, then he wants to see his son continue working rather than sending him to school.

Parents tended to develop their own calculations of costs and develop priorities for family needs, and so some would decide to take their children to work. An editorial in *The Daily Star* (2016, February 28) reported poverty as the main impediment to students completing their education. The financial burden on the family does not allow them to continue their study and so students leave school at the age of 15 and engage in full-time work. The costs to the family are twofold: the actual educational expenses and the cost to spending time at school. Ahmed (2003) described these as direct and opportunity costs.

Afsar, a teacher, suggested:

When parents become happy with their current financial situation, they do not consider the future. They do not consider that after receiving education their children would contribute more than in the current situation.

From the teachers' points of view it was parental attitudes that were the basis of the problem. In the previous chapter, I described the parents' perceptions in some detail. I reflected in my journal about the need for two-way communication so that the parties could better understand the complexities of the situation.

Child marriage

While work was the major reason for boys to drop out of education, early marriage was a major reason for girls.

Tahmina described the impact on her school of girls leaving to get married:

Our school was a girls school. After a few years we converted our girls school to a co-education school. We had found that a minimum number of students

appeared for the public examination. For that reason, we received pressure from our authority, and then we decided to convert our school to a co-education one and started enrolling boys.

Early marriage of girls is an issue throughout rural regions of Bangladesh. Like some other teachers Tahmina saw child marriage¹ as the death of a dream: girls would drop out of school to be married and stop their education.

The average rate of child marriage in Bangladesh is 66 percent (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2016). The government of Bangladesh is trying to stop child marriage through law. However it is still common practice, particularly in poorer families. Several participants in this study described the effects of child marriage with disappointment. The most common comment that came was that at a time when girl students were supposed to spend their happy moments with their parents at home, and play with their friends and with books and pens, they were restricted to playing with cutlery for making food for their father-in-law's house and spending time for making their new family members happy. Teachers indicated that child marriage is customary in this region. Most parents still tend to consider keeping their daughter with them as a burden. Moreover, there is often pressure from the community to arrange an early marriage of a daughter. Amzad, a parent, shared his experience:

My neighbours and other community people criticise me for my daughter's literacy. They ask me: are you planning to make your girl a barrister? Do not keep your adult daughter with you!

It was evident that parents felt pressure to marry their daughter and the need to provide a dowry added to their pressure. Maruf, a teacher, explained:

Parents have their intention to get their daughter married as early as possible, and it comes from their poverty, lack of knowledge, and some misperceptions. The high rate of the dowry system which is practised in the community adds extra tension and pressure to parents. In seeking relief from their insecurity parents send their daughter to her husband's house organising marriage rather than school.

¹ The legal age for marriage is 18. Recently the law has been adapted to allow marriage at 16 in some specified circumstances. Nevertheless rural custom tends to favour teenaged girls being married. This practice is commonly called child marriage.

In many cases girls did not yet feel prepared for getting married, but it was the common practice in the community. Amzad explained his logic for his daughters' early marriage this way:

It is so terrible for a girl to keep her beauty for longer; I do not know what will happen after the teenage years of my daughter. At the immature stage, people show their interest to marry a girl, so it is better to get married at that time when people are expecting it.

Abul Hossain added:

Parents decide to arrange a marriage for their daughter to save her from eve-teasing. When parents are facing a problem with the eve teasing they receive a marriage proposal from any family for their daughter then they do not want to delay and miss the chance as they see the offer as an opportunity.

Child marriage has an impact on girls' education as it gives them little chance for higher education. When girl students get married they shift their address to the husband house, and become bound to the new family, and do not continue their study because of different responsibilities. Some teachers pointed to this factor as one of the main reason for the increasing girls' dropout rate within this region, which is on turn a reflection of the rural context in Bangladesh. Emdad explained how difficult it was for girls to continue studying after marriage:

A few other girl students are trying to continue their study after their marriage, just by attending in the exam, and they are not doing well. This year three students have participated in the SSC exam after their marriage, but all of them failed. Rarely a few students might get a pass mark with a low GPA, and that will be the end of their study.

The description by participants of child marriage within the community society revealed how traditionally embedded were attitudes to bringing up of girls, and how values had been passed from generation to generation. Habits of gender disparity and the pressure of educational expenses on poor parents serve to place less importance on daughters' education. I reflected that despite law changes, stipends and policy initiatives many parents in rural communities were not yet changing their received perceptions about child marriage. They did not seem to believe that if their girls were educated, it would be easy

for them to get married. Parents in this region seemed to be afraid to keep their daughter at the school for too long. Moshiur described the reasons for parent's attitudes in this way:

Most commonly parents cannot bear the educational expenses for their daughter; they decide to marry off their daughter early to cut down the expenditure. The other reason is that within the community a young daughter is in high demand for marriage so that parents decide to marry off their daughter when they receive an offer from a good family. They fear that after a few years they may not receive a good offer from any family.

In addition, parents feel a need to resolve the need to protect their daughter from eve-teasing, which is described further in a following section. Change to parental attitudes and the evolution of a new vision for girls' education remains a challenge in this region that would require sustained communication between parents and schools and the development of combined endeavours.

Young people's misbehaviour

The teachers repeatedly told me that until a certain age, children need and have a right to expect parental care, time, sweet talk, overall counselling and guidance. Parental interest, they affirmed, has a positive impact on building children's confidence and sometimes works as motivation in their lives. Teachers also stated that such kind of parental care and supervision were missing in the context of these communities. Some of the parents I interviewed admitted that their busyness with work prevented them from spending time with their children, and acknowledge that their children were depriving of such kind of parental support.

Every student in the secondary schools is a teenager; most of them are between eleven and seventeen years of age. The nature of the teenager is pithily described in a poem by Rabindranath Thakur, the great Bengali poet and noble laureate:

বারো চৌদ্দ বছরের মত এমন বালাই আর নাই।

There is no pest like a twelve- fourteen year old child.

Similarly clear statements were made by teachers about their students. They indicated that they were very concerned about the increase of youth apathy and misbehaviour in their community. Shahana described teenage students:

In this age, students are very curious about everything; they try to get involved in different activities, experience new adventures, and seem to need to prove they are a hero to their friends. As a result they get involved in different unsocial activities.

I found participants in this study would spontaneously talk about two issues in the community that worried them and there was a recognised need for adult concern: about eve-teasing and addiction. These two problems were related to the boys' activities, but girls were the victims of eve-teasing.

Eve teasing

Like in all other parts of Bangladesh, eve teasing was identified as one of the problems in this region. Maruf explained the nature of the eve teasing:

When girls are coming to attend school, then they receive bad comments from the boys. Sometimes the boys take a picture or a video without getting any permission. They may pull at a girls' scarf, and even make proposals of love. Sometimes girls receive physical harassment when they refuse an eve-teaser's proposal and protest against their activities.

Many of the participants in this study expressed their concern about this issue. Some participants directly connected the term parental engagement as the need to stop eve-teasing. However, on the whole participants limited their comments to identifying the problem. Emdad explained:

We know well about the students and the outsiders who are involved with eve-teasing and creating a problem in the community and for the girls. Some of them have a strong political family background; some of them have muscle power. So individual initiatives against them are risky, but co-ordinated efforts could stop the situation.

Participants told me that some eve-teasers were boy students, and some of them were spoiled boys from outsider the locality; sometimes they would join up together. Eve-

teasers would select a particular location where girls would usually walk to go to school and return. In this region, students need to walk for long distance to reach school. Sometimes this distance becomes awful for the girls.

Nasir Uddin added:

Good looking girls are mostly affected by the eve-teasers. They receive annoyance from the young eve-teasers on the street and to avoid that harassment and to protect their safety they do not continue their study. Parents also do not feel secure about sending their daughter to the school for that reason, and so they decide for child marriage.

Teachers explained that the girl students who were facing these problems were usually those from families from low socio-economic backgrounds who were leading a simple life and not offending in any ways. The consequences of eve-teasing would sometime become very cruel. Because of the eve teasing some girls would escape from their house and take shelter at their relative's house. Both teachers and parents shared their experiences of eve-teasing and how parents were suffering because of it. Emdad took me to a father named Belal who had a negative experience. Belal described the experience he had with his daughter:

My daughter was receiving a proposal for love from an eve-teaser on the way to and back from school. When eve-teaser did not get any positive response from my daughter he came to me and wanted to marry my daughter. He was not doing anything so he could not take responsibility for my daughter. Naturally, I refused his proposal, and then he became angry with me and said he would look at me further. To avoid any other further incidences I took my daughter to her grandfather's house and arranged her marriage with a suitable groom.

I witnessed a related incident during the period of my data collection. One day I reached one of the schools to collect data and I found several people in the school field, including local political leaders, SMC members and few other parents. I waited in the office room until they finished their meeting. Teachers informed me about the reason for their presence: one student had been disturbing a girl student outside the school for a long time, but in the last few days ago that student tried to hold her hands inside the classroom and that make that girl scared and she decided not to attend the class. When this comes to

parents' and teachers' knowledge, they called this meeting. Finally, the student apologised for his behaviour and promised not to do such a thing in the future, and the leaders told him that if he were to repeat the offence then he would receive a forced transfer certificate from the school.

It was evident that there was an interconnection between child marriage and eve-teasing, with parents deciding for early marriage and stopping their children education. Participants talked about the importance of joint initiatives from the ground level, whereby parents, teachers and community people could co-ordinate efforts. Emdad emphasised the importance of developing "the consciousness of parents and community people for creating a free and fair educational environment for the girls".

Addiction

There is a law forbidding sale of cigarettes to anyone under 18 years of age. However, this law is not applied strictly in this region, as well as all over Bangladesh. Moreover, in this area it is possible to purchase single cigarettes from the shops. The World Health Organisation (2008) conducted a survey in Bangladesh on who usually buys cigarette from different stores and 97.8% stated that when they want to purchase a cigarette the store never refuse them because of their age. In this situation, teachers expressed the hope that a coordinated initiative by the school with parents and community could create pressure on the sellers to stop selling to school-going students. Teachers shared that it was not just about cigarettes but also other addictive substances and claimed that a habit with cigarettes leads students to experiment with different things.

Realising the danger of students' addiction the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (2015) issued an order whereby formation of five members committees, named *Intoxicating, and Drug Opposed Committees*, was proposed. These committees were to consist of the head teacher, teacher representative, guardian representative, student representative and physical education teacher as member secretary. This committee would have responsibility to hold a meeting each month, and to communicate with the parents whose children are addicted and to take any necessary steps. However, during my data collection period I did not see any steps that are taken by the committee; some of participants not even know about the committee's formation and responsibilities. Didar Hossain said:

We usually talk about the bad effect of addiction whenever we get the chance in our school programmes and meetings. But we do not have any constructive initiatives by the formed committee.

Several teachers talked about students' addiction with tobacco increasing day by day and reported that sometimes addicted students would influence other students to join with them. They reported that students became involved in addiction by the influence of outside friends who were not studying anywhere. Most of the students were teenagers who were affected by peer pressure and in turn affecting others. Emdad explained that he could notice different attitudes from the smokers:

In the classroom the students who are addicted to the tobacco look different than others. Most of them could not pay attention to the classroom activities. They cannot follow my lectures, and they create a disturbance in the classroom.

In the context of Bangladesh, students are getting easy access to smoking. Sometimes they miss school and become involved in anti-social, and even dangerous, activities. Teachers in this study seemed to realise that a co-ordinated movement within the community could improve the situation. Abul Hossain stated:

I shared their children's problem with addiction with some parents individually. However, they do not want to believe that their children can do that. They consider the sharing as blame and do not want to take as their own. That type of situation creates a distance with the parents.

Abul Hossain added that:

I found a few students are involved with tobacco addiction, and most of them are involved with other anti-social activities. We discussed it with them individually, and discussed their children's problems with the parents, but it does not work. Parents do not agree with us and do not accept the blame; they do not want to accept that their children can do that. Then we issued a Transfer Certificate to them.

Teachers also explained that if they take any initiatives against any addicted student they would face different types of local pressure from various community people. They reported that in the initial stage parents did not want to accept any negative blame from the

teachers. At the end, when teachers took action against the student, then parents tried to pressurise the teachers to withdraw the decision.

Educational expenses

The previous chapter reported how parents expressed their worry about their lack of job security and how it makes them prioritise their family expenses. Here I further examine educational expenses and their impact. Parents have responsibility for covering the educational expenses that are needed for students' schooling and throughout Bangladesh parental support for education is essential. However, parents from this region struggle with their children educational expenses, and it becomes a burden when their family economic conditions are *hand to mouth*. In his research Alam (2016) used the proverbial saying *nun ante panta furay* to explain the common rural family's condition. He explained the meaning as *if I buy salt I will come home and see there is no rice; so how can I eat?* If parents buy education there may be no money left for rice. The dilemma and the pressure are common throughout rural regions in Bangladesh. The situation is perhaps even more vulnerable in the region of my study as it is a flood affected area.

The common description that comes from the participants was that the core requirement of the people from this area was food and then clothes and medicine. Educational expenses come after fulfilling all of those needs. Many families struggled with managing food and other family needs. Shahana shared that “to some families, education seems like laughing at low level”. A poem by Sukanta Bhattacharya describes the priorities of life in the face of poverty:

ক্ষুধার রাজ্যে পৃথিবী গদ্যময় পূর্ণিমা- চাঁদ যেন	The world is devastated by hunger that is
ঝলসানো রুটি	rendered so matter-of-fact that the full
	moon looks like grilled bread.

To hungry people, the moon looks like grilled bread. But the bread is remote in the sky. That is perhaps how the promises of education appear to parents who are struggling to manage their basic life needs. When parents can manage all other requirements, then they try to think of their children's education. Javed explained:

Educational expenses need to be ensured by the parents. However, in our context, in most cases we can see that parents fail to provide that support in an efficient way. Sometimes parents consider those things as their burden, and that comes from a lack of ability to help and a struggle with everyday life.

As stated earlier the government is offering free books and a stipend to reduce pressure on parents. However Javed added that further expenses are involved:

Besides the support from the government, students need other support from parents when they are enrolled in school. There are expenses like paper, pen, examination fees, session charge, supporting books and so on. These depend on their parents' support and without that students cannot continue their study properly.

An irony is that in this region parents sometimes takes their children to work with them to get some extra money for their family needs, but it remains hard for parents to contribute educational expenses.

Teachers expressed disappointment that their students were facing hardship in getting even a little support from their parents. Sometimes they needed to wait for two or three days for minimal equipment. Emdad pointed out that students lost eagerness to attend the school. Sometimes they would not go to school before getting paper and pencils to avoid teachers' comments. He added:

When a student needs to ask three or four times to get a pen or paper from their parents, they lose their interest. In the same way, when they cannot manage those items, sometimes teachers tease them in the classroom, and then they feel shy in front of the other students, and for that reason, they become discouraged about school.

Afsar shared:

When parents send their children to the school parents need to provide the educational expenses for that. In opposite way, parents think of missing income from their children and resent that they need to pay for sending them to school.

Some parents also expressed their sorrow for their failure to provide educational expenses. They acknowledged that they felt guilty about their inability to provide nutritious food for

their children and about their struggle to carry the additional costs of their children's education. Amzad acknowledged:

I do not have hesitation to sharing my failure of carrying out my responsibilities to provide nutritious food to my daughter and other educational expenses to continue my daughter's study in a proper way.

Students in this area struggled considerably to get their basic requirements for attending to their education. Parental limitations in providing support would create problems. Roy (2017) reported the struggles of primary school students in another part of the char area, a coastal land area in a river, in Bangladesh. There the students did not get a chance to wear warm clothes and shoes during the winter season, and they needed to walk four kilometres in their bare feet. He added that those students also need to work in the field to support their parents. I reflected that the dilemma remains for poor families in rural areas: they struggle to pay for educational expenses, and in some cases simply cannot; failure to provide their children's basic educational material often makes their children drop out of the education which could offer a way out of poverty. It seemed there was real need to honest and constructive dialogue between parents and schools to see ways through the problem.

Pressure piled on pressure (মরার উপর খাড়ার ঘা)

Educational expenses are often augmented by practices that are common throughout Bangladesh. Students need to buy the guidebook for most of the subjects because teachers commonly follow the guidebook for lectures in class. The government has sought to reduce the pressure of educational expenses by providing free books for all students since 2011. However I observed that students were carrying guidebooks in their bag to attend class and they are not carrying their textbooks. National Education Policy, 2010 described the guidebook, coaching, and private tuition as hindrances to a quality education system. It also discouraged these activities (Ministry of Education, 2010b) by circulating an order, but that has not been implemented. Both teachers and parents among my participants expressed hope that respect for the law could stop the use of guidebooks. One of the teachers, Afsar, expected that:

We need to be conscious and work together against guidebooks, and only we can convince teachers not to use guidebooks in the class. Otherwise, it would be very hard to implement government order of stopping guidebooks at the field level.

Private tuition was another burden that was identified by most of the parents I interviewed. Julhash stated:

Private tuition is an unwritten compulsory requirement for the students in this region. Most the teachers are involved with this activity and students need to attend their classes for learning privately.

Throughout the country teachers usually offer tuition before and after school hours, and for that they usually charge 500 to 1000 taka from each student. Fees vary from teacher to teacher, and depend on demand, the quality of the teacher and the publicity he generates. Several parents said that they could not afford the tuition expenses, but they got pressure from teachers to send their children. Bilkis shared her experience:

We get a kind of force from the teachers to send our children for private tuition. Only those students who attend private tuition get attention in the classroom.

A few other parents also stated that students would not get attention in class if they did not go for private tuition. For that reason some of the parents saw education as a costly process, and there would be a negative effect on those parents who were unable to pay the private tuition fees. Julhash spoke about the situation with disappointment and frustration:

When I have failed to provide very basic requirements for my children educational needs, such as good clothes, food, books, pencils, guide books, and examination fees, then how I can provide private tuition for my son? In this region, I have seen that without attending any private tuition no one can get a good result.

It is now an open secret in Bangladesh that teachers are involved with private tuition and coaching centres: it affects the entire education system. Teachers pay less attention to the classroom and teachers' performance are evaluating by their private students' performance in examinations. Monir claimed:

At present, teachers are not evaluated by their school success; their success is evaluated by those students who are attended private tuition. Teachers are giving

their main attention to their private students because they consider results as their prestige. This is not only in our region; you can get the same picture all over the country.

In 2012, the government of Bangladesh introduced a new law, *Coaching Business Banned Law- 2012 for School Teachers* (Ministry of Education, 2012), for stopping teachers' involvement in private tuition and banned coaching for teachers. That law made it explicit that coaching and private tuition affected poor children and that parents were suffering because of the expenses. It also nominated a punishment for teachers who continued to be involved in the tuition business. However, implementation of this law has been difficult. Alamgir (2014) reported that the law was not working at field level; teachers were still continuing the business of tuition. In his report he cited that the coaching business in Bangladesh is valued at about 32000 crore taka¹. Participants in this study emphasised the need for collaborative awareness and possible action in regard to private tuition.

It was apparent from my observation and various participants reports that in this region, as elsewhere in the country, teachers' involvement with private practices and the associated extra money was affecting students' learning in the classroom. Moreover, it seemed to be mainly affecting those students who were struggling to meet regular expenses for education. Monir stated:

If a student does not join with any teachers for private tuition then he does not get good marks in the exam, and teachers do not give equal importance to all students.

It was widely believed that student's performance in the classroom and in the examination depends on extra coaching. Those who cannot afford any private tuition do not get a good result and do not receive the teacher's attention. Then students become demotivated. It occurs particularly with two subjects, Mathematics and English, as most students are weak in these two subjects, and teachers take advantage of their weakness. Lal Mia reported:

My son always requests me to send him to any teacher for private tuition, as he is facing problems and not getting full support from the teacher in the class. He expects everything will be okay if he can work with any teacher.

¹ Crore is mostly used counting term in Bangladesh currency; 01 crore is 10000000 taka, which is equivalent to 125000 US dollar approximately.

Tapash claimed that teachers were not providing their full effort in classroom teaching, but rather had become more commercial and were chasing money. He said:

The awful situation is that some teachers in our school do not waste their time, and it seems like they are doing their private job when they are walking in the street.

Students who could afford it would go to the teachers for private study, aiming for good marks in the examination and avoiding teachers' negligence. On the other hand those students who could not study privately often became demotivated with their study. Some parents articulated strong opinions regarding private tuition. They criticised teachers' professionalism and their commitment to their responsibilities. Torab stated:

I think teacher passion in school activities is absent, and they are also mostly busy with their private work, and the reason is that they are not accountable to anyone. Both parents and SMC are not negotiating on this issue with the teachers. Teachers are not even feeling guilty to do this.

Emdad talked openly about his involvement in private tuition, and admitted that it affected his daily lectures, although there was a little shyness on his face when he was talking about his personal reality. He acknowledged that private tuition did affect his school lectures because, as he was human, he had limited capacity to work. He argued that teachers did not get time to think about school improvement and students' development. He said:

In the morning I spend two hours with 15 students in each hour for teaching them privately. I lose my energy there. When school time starts, I can manage the first two hours; after that my body and brain do not allow me to give my full effort in the class lecture. Because I know that after school time I will be involved with tuition and for that reason I need to save my energy.

Most of the teachers I interviewed agreed about the impact of private tuition on parents' financial capacity. Minhaj acknowledged, "I can understand that private tuition adds an extra burden to the parents' expenses".

Several teachers explained their need for involvement of private tuition. They stated they been forced to involve themselves with private work because their struggle to provide for their own family's needs. They talked about the irregularity and low scale of their salary

system. A recurring statement was that because of their struggle with their family condition they failed to concentrate in the classroom. Minhaj said:

I would spoil my mental outlook at home and come to school with different types of problems and disturbances playing around in my mind. It would impact on how I conducted my class. Sometimes I would rebuff my students without any reason.

Private tuition was reported to be the only option for the teachers to earn extra money to meet their increasing family expenses. Afsar explained:

I involve myself in teaching privately because of some extra money, for surviving in this society in a right way. Truly speaking, the way parents can express their family needs and condition, I cannot. I cannot as a teacher. I do not want to disclose my family issues here.

Rashid (2016) reported similar findings: teachers were involved in private tuition because they needed to meet the needs of their families, and the law was not acknowledging their needs. There are numerous debates and claims in media, and in publications (Nath, 2008). The government introduced a new salary scale in 2015 (Ministry of Finance [MoF], 2015). With respect for their financial needs the government now allows teachers to provide private tuition for students from other institutions than their own and for no more than ten students, with the permission of their head teacher. The reason for not allowing teachers to privately teach their own students is to minimise discrimination in class and in internal examinations. However, the government is struggling to implement the law.

Several parents told me they did not know about the law. Selina said:

I did not know about the law before. This is the first time I am hearing about this law. However, my question is: how it is running openly even in the school premises if it is banned?

Her comment indicated that many parents had not caught up with the government's policies for improving education. Participants acknowledged that parental awareness of current policy could support the implementation of government initiatives. When discussion turned to the role the SMC could play in these issues, participants voiced disappointment with SMC members and gave their opinion that SMC was not paying to

attention to the situation. Tapash stated: “In the current situation SMC committee has become a pocket committee¹. We cannot expect any operative step from them”.

Distrust of SMC

Other parents and teachers echoed the description of SMC as a pocket committee that was formed and was operating under local political pressure or according to pressure from teachers.

Jahurul stated:

Political parties always want to see their representation in the school committee, and they offer parents’ names for the committee. The school cannot make the committee by avoiding those names. Once the nominees have become committee members, they become happy and do not care about education issues.

The benefit that members get from their representation is that they can appoint teachers by their choice and have a flow of political representation in their sector. Jahurul stated:

Parent members in the SMC mostly do not know anything about their responsibilities and for that reason; they cannot contribute anything to school improvement. However, they do not care about those responsibilities, but they try interfering with financial issues and want to receive some benefits from school. On the other hand, it is rare that parent members pay attention to school problems and improvement issues.

Parents added that sometimes teachers wanted to make their school committee by their choice so that they could run their school in their way. Kohinor complained:

Sometimes, we do not know about the process of forming the committee. The teachers do not disclose it openly, and make the committee in their way with their choice.

¹ Pocket Committee is a familiar way in the region of describing SMC, that committee is formed by the political influences or teachers choices

A few teachers agreed with the parents' complaint and shared that they did not want to take any pressure from the committee. They did not want anyone to monitor their activities. Minhaj stated:

We want to keep our school free from political pressure and unnecessary illogical interference from the committee. A politically supported committee would block rather than support our innovative plan without understanding the meaning. We want the kind of members whom we can convince.

The SMC has authority for managing the school and budgeting for the school. SMC members have the opportunity to spend school funds for infrastructure development and other development work. Some parents expressed suspicions of malpractice and misuse of school funds for personal benefit. Tapash claimed:

Nowadays, dedicated parents are not taking part in the SMC. Those who are coming are coming with the intention of gaining some personal benefit. Moreover, for that reason, they spend an enormous amount of money in the election process. They consider spending money in the election as an investment.

Participants asserted that some parent members of the SMC take their role as an opportunity to develop their fame in the community. Torab said:

He (*mentioning one member's name*) was a government service holder, and now he is retired. He spent most of his life in different places because of his job. Now he has leisure time and feels he wants to be popular with the people with a future political motive. During the time for the election, he circulated posters in every corner of our area. Now everyone knows him within a very short time, not only from our region but also from other parts of our upazila.

Some participants added that if parents could introduce themselves as a member of a managing committee that would make them proud. It was argued that most members get involved as an opportunity to create a new identity in their society. Some SMC members I talked to at various times told me about their contribution to developing infrastructural facilities in the school but none talked about any initiatives they had taken for improving the quality of education or improving communication process with the parents.

I reflected after this discussion that, at this stage, SMC did not seem to be a possible base for creating open dialogue between parents and teachers or for organising collaborative initiatives that would lead to better communication, and eventual action, for education.

Emergent themes

The issues identified by parents and teachers indicate the importance of both home and school in children's education and strongly suggest need for communication between parents and teachers and for a collaborative base from which to address problems.

Issues directly related to basic classroom learning included the limited time available for covering the syllabus and preparing students for examinations with the consequent need for parental supervision of study at home, the absenteeism of boy students because they are taken to work by their parents and their resulting drop-out from schooling and the withdrawal of girl students from school for early marriage. Underlying these obvious issues (and many of the other issues discussed in this section) are two significant and widespread problems: one that of poverty and the other is the still underdeveloped state of schooling within rural Bangladesh (Alam, 2016; Salahuddin, 2016). Both problems are too enormous and complex to be resolved by simple communication, but the creation of platforms for communication would help parents and teachers to understand each other's pressures and could lead to collaborative action to address some of the surface issues. The next chapter offers the illustrative example of how one principal created that kind of communication.

Issues related to social misbehaviour included boys loitering into the night, eve-teasing and experimenting with addictive substances. The previous chapter reported how parents and teachers tended to have very different attitudes about who was responsible for young people's moral development. The experiences reported in this chapter highlight the need for collaborative discussion about the problems. As I was recording the reporting of these issues in this region, I was aware that similar issues also occur in urban areas in Bangladesh. Recently, a number of incidents involving illegal activities have been reported in media together with criticism of the apparent lack of parental care and concern. Various daily newspapers reported that a law would be imposed to check on children who are seen outside school during school hours. I wondered if perhaps rural communities might be better placed to reduce such problems if all the sectors of the community could

work together. I noted that the need for parental engagement was not limited to producing academic results.

The dual rural problems of poverty and an underdeveloped education system were again evident in issues related to the use of guidebooks and private tuition. To varying extents parents and teachers experienced the pressures of poverty. Teachers explained they were driven to engage in private tuition in order to supplement wages that were inadequate for supporting their family. Parents explained that while some in the community could afford private tuition, many could not. Parents felt directly and indirectly pressured to send their children to private tuition and believed that their children would be neglected in class if they did not. The use of guidebooks, and the tension about being able to pay for them, could be seen as a further manifestation of the underlying problems of poverty and an underdeveloped education system. Teachers' reliance in guidebooks, their need to earn extra money by tuition, their tiredness during school hours and their stress about completing the curriculum as well as preparing students for examinations are indicators of systemic problems still existing in the national development of education and that have been reported by other researchers (Manzoor, 2013; Alam, 2016). I reflected that although improved communication between parents and teachers could not eliminate such problems, it could create more transparency and perhaps develop bases from which specific aspects of the problems could be discussed and addressed.

Another issue that was identified by participants was that the SMC was not perceived by either the parents or the teachers in the study as a body that could take leadership in addressing educational problems or in creating a space for open and collaborative dialogue between parents and teachers about contentious issues. I noted that this one was one of the key bodies identified in policy as a means of creating community engagement. I reflected that if engagement was to be developed it would need to come from grassroots initiatives.

While most of the statements from participants identified issues and experiences that appeared to make engagement difficult, the group also indicated that it is not impossible. As our discussion progressed suggestions were made about how to improve communication and support parents' involvement in their children's learning.

Possible initiatives to bring parents into the school programmes

In the group discussion, after talking about problems participants also made suggestions about how they could bring change to their current engagement processes. The majority of the participants in the group discussion participated in offering some possibilities from their understanding of their context and current situation. They seemed to believe that they could improve the current situation. Their suggestions reflected what they had previously said about existing barriers, and moving on to exploring possibilities. I was very keen to know about the possible ways to bring the parties closer so they could begin working together.

At the beginning of the conversation some of the participants seemed to feel they could hardly think about changing their initiatives because previously they had not really thought about the existing initiatives. Earlier discussion had been limited to blaming one another rather than thinking of improvements. However, Jabed, an assistant teacher, said:

It (*ways to improve*) is an excellent topic to talk about and as teachers we need to discuss this and think about it very deeply.

Emdad seemed to take time consider, and then said:

As a teacher, it makes me thoughtful and I ask myself why parents are not coming when we are inviting them. Although I have hardly reached a solution, at this moment I can say there is a gap between parents and teachers and that could be a reason they do not respond to us.

Edris said:

Still I can realise the gap between both teacher and parents, and we are blaming each other. Without filling the gap, expecting a response from the parents will not be possible.

Recognise parents

Several participants acknowledged that there were gap between them and parents. As soon as they were talking about their gap, they also started talking about reducing the gap. They suggested the need to first bring parents in the school showing them respect and creating a positive school environment for them. Bilkis, a parent, said:

If I need to wait and look for anyone to talk to after coming to school, then it is embarrassing. I expect someone would come to me and ask about my purpose. Serving my purpose will come later, as a parent I expect a good approach first.

Several parents acknowledged that teachers were already in the respected position in the community, which was evident in daily social practice. Participants suggested the need to show respect for parents. “Respect each other” was a recurring phrase in participants’ suggestions. Moshiur emphasised increasing respect to one another and minimising the blaming of one another:

Teachers should show respect to any parent when they visit with any issues. At the same time, parents should show their respect to teachers, at least when they invite parents to a programme. In this way negative attitudes can be erased from everyone’s mind with helping attitudes to one another.

Maya stated that when she would get proper respect from the teachers, then she would be ready to co-operate with them. She said:

Co-operation comes after compliance, and value from anyone makes the relationship healthy. This collaboration will not be one sided; as a parent, it is my responsibility to co-operate with the school programmes and other initiatives. When both teachers and parents come forward in one step then co-operation will come through us.

Edris suggested that it was necessary to create a comfort zone to bring parents into the school and that the building of a relationship between parents and teachers could create an environment where the parents could feel comfort to share their children’s activities and express their opinions. He expressed his hope:

Teachers need to create a relationship with the parents that can make parents feel comfortable with the teachers for discussing their children’s education.

I have already discussed how, in the context of the rural setting, there is a real gap between parents and teachers in various ways. Because of family background and position in the community parents often did not feel comfortable in visiting the school and talking to teachers. Teachers were already getting respect from the parents in this community. However, parents who were mostly engaged in hard manual work were not receiving

proper respect from the teachers, although that did not mean that they were getting disrespect. Now teachers and parents were talking about respecting each other. They were suggesting this could make parents feel valued and accepted in the school and they would then feel comfortable in visiting the school.

Increase individual communication

Both parents and teachers emphasised the need to increase personal communication in order to build a relationship. Minhaj stated:

For introducing individual communication, at the initial step every teacher needs to come forward with their willingness and for that we do not need to get permission or support from anyone; we only need our bona fide wishes.

He added:

For personal communication, I can choose the students who are not performing well in the classroom, who are not attending class regularly and escaping from the school after a few classes or are getting involved in anti-social activities. I can communicate with those parents and can share everything and discuss what their role could be. I hope this way will change students' performance as well as create a good relationship with the parents.

When Minhaj shared his idea of individual communication, several other teachers expressed their willingness to start individual communication with selected parents. They expressed their intention to communicate with those parents whose children's performance and other activities suggested they needed to be talked about. In that way they wanted to gradually bring all the other parents into an individual communication network. Shahana suggested:

I think it would be easy for us to communicate with those parents who we need to communicate with for their children's performance, and then we can spread our communication to others.

Teachers talked about trying to involve every teacher in the communication process. Afsar picked up the importance of the subject teacher's role in communication. He said:

I think subject-based teachers know their students well: which student is good at which subject, and in which subject they have a problem. So as I am an English

teacher, I know who is not performing well in my class. I can contact the parents and can get their support at home for their children. This would be easiest way to include all teachers in this initiative.

Abul Hossain discussed the class teacher's role, noting that a class teacher's responsibilities were different, with extra work assigned. He pointed out that it is an unwritten rule that head teachers would choose the most efficient ones when selecting class teachers. He added:

We can choose our productive class teachers, and their particular assignment would be to find out with whom we need to communicate individually. Then he can communicate or can pass it on to other teachers or to me, and then I can communicate with them.

Nasir Uddin reminded the group that personal communication with parents should not be only with the parents whose children were not performing well. He said:

Sometimes we need to communicate with the parents about positive things and have regular conversations as well. To do that, we could introduce an area meeting with the parents to increase general awareness.

Nasir then put forward a question:

Why are we only talking about parents visiting our school? Sometimes teachers need to go to them to make them aware of their children's education and how they can play their active role and co-operate with us.

He added:

We can pick out an area, considering the area of student's houses. Then we can conduct an area meeting with parents, SMC members, and teachers and, if possible, with other community personnel. There we can discuss children's schooling, aiming to develop parental awareness. We can consider this as “উঠান বৈঠক”, a yard meeting. I hope this process will create a sense of the importance of parental participation.

The discussion that took place between the parents and teachers was in itself a beginning of an improved communication process. Teachers were accepting that they should take

responsibility for developing communication with parents, focusing on building rapport. I reflected that the suggestion of an area meeting could be a non-confrontational way of opening communication and might eventually become a platform for tackling the kinds of problems discussed earlier in this chapter.

Improve the invitation process

Chapter Five reported how parents were dissatisfied with the schools' processes of invitation to programmes. They expressed an expectation that better ways could be found than the current practice. In the group meeting, Tapash, like other parents, stated that he expected to receive an invitation letter from the teachers. However, he acknowledged the pressure on teachers and their involvement in organising the event, and stated he could receive the letter from any staff of the school rather than from his children. That would, he said, create a sense of importance. Tapash suggested:

Teachers can invite parents through local leaders and local representatives by seeking their favour as they are part of the community; it will carry more importance to the parents. At the same time, they can utilise the workforce of the local area, those who are known as chowkidar (চকিদার *or village police*) can deliver an invitation letter to the parent's hand.

Several parents suggested that the pressure to earn money and their busy schedules sometimes made them forget the invitation notice that had received earlier from school on the programme day. Minhaj said:

Parents are oblivious so that they miss attending school programmes when teachers invite them.

Afsar offered:

Involving parents in the school programmes requires us to remind parents and show them the importance of meeting, and we need to create a festive mood among the parents that make them want to attend.

He further suggested:

We can announce school programmes during the *Jumma* prayer time in the mosque which is held every Friday, where the Imam can play a role by his speech and in

the weekly market day (হাটবার). That way we can provide the message of the importance of parental participation in school events.

Emdad recommended the use of technology as another option for communicating and inviting parents in a direct way. He said:

In the rural context in Bangladesh, some may not be able to use email or other technology, but still we can use a mobile as communication with the parents. Mobile is the very cheapest tool in our context, and from my experience, I can share with you that most of the parents use a mobile for their needs.

Other teachers agreed with Emdad, and suggested that the school might allocate funds for calling expenses. Moshiur suggested:

We can also collect the mobile numbers of all parents and then we can communicate with parents about students' activities at home. Initially, we can talk with those parents whose children are weak, irregular, and have a chance to drop out from school. In another way, communication could be area based and on a weekly basis and different teachers could be assigned for communicating with the parents of the area.

Teachers also suggested that they can take the opportunity to visit different area to talk about the programme of the school, and this could be one of the best ways to come closer to the parents and spend time with them. This way relationship with parents would improve. Shahana offered:

We can go in a group to invite parents to a student's house. This home visit can be after school and in holiday time. That way we can deal with several parents and students as individual cases.

Providing refreshment to the guest in any type of programme is a long-time tradition in Bengali culture, particularly with a formal invitation. At least tea or coffee and a biscuit are offered for refreshment and, getting the offer, the guest feels honoured. This practice is regularly visible in the offices, schools, homes and many other places. Tahmina and several other head teachers stated that parents expect refreshments, such as *singara* or *samucha*, the local food items, from the school on the day of invitation. It added extra importance to the invitation if the school informed parents that refreshments would be

provided. Tahmina reported that when she could provide refreshments parental participation was beyond expectation. However, it has argued that most of the schools would not be able to offer that refreshment all the time because of their very limited funds and the large number of parents who would then attend.

I personally experienced the dilemma when Nasir Uddin was inviting an SMC member to my focus group discussion over the phone. I was sitting in front of him and heard Nasir telling the member that he would provide something from his capacity on that day. After finishing the conversation Nasir told me that the SMC member had asked him what he would provide on the day.

Invite mothers to the school programmes

In looking for ways to increase the participation of parents in school programmes several parents talked about encouraging mothers to attend. They suggested that mothers would be able to respond to the school invitation as most of them were housewives and would typically stay at home and take care of their children's activities at home. On the other hand, fathers were mostly busy with their work and stayed away from the house, and so had little involvement with their children's activities. Kohinor, a parent, said:

In the school activities and programmes, I have seen that fathers are getting attention as a parent. However, most of the time fathers are busy outside for different purposes and cannot respond to the school invitation. The school authority can see mothers as parents, and then mothers may come. We receive invitation letter from the school where they mention the father's name and expect his attendance, but if it was a simple invitation letter, then I would come. Invitations need to be open for both mothers and fathers.

Several parents made a similar complaint and teachers agreed with the parents. Teachers acknowledged the importance of mothers' participation and their engagement with their children's schooling. They also acknowledged the reality of the situation of fathers' work. They agreed that it would sometimes not be possible for fathers to spend time observing their children's activities, but mothers could give their time. Moshiur said:

I think the mother would be the best option for taking care of their children and attending school programmes. If we can make mothers aware and can

communicate with them on a regular basis, then they can play their role in their children's education in a very close way with their friendly behaviour.

Emdad suggested a mothers' assembly could be introduced to increase mothers' attendance and utilise their capacity. He also suggested mothers' lack of political involvement would be a positive factor:

From my experience, I can say that mothers do not get involved with any political parties directly. So having politicians as guests will not be a problem with the mother. So there is a chance of maximising mothers' participation during a parents' assembly.

As the group talked enthusiastically about mothers' involvement in the school programmes and mothers' awareness, Moshiur raised a caution:

Mothers from this area are mostly uneducated, and they do not have the ability to support their children in their academic needs. High expectation from the mothers will not be so wise. So we need to consider how to define their possible support for their children.

Other teachers suggested that more general support could be expected from the mother. Mothers' efforts, they argued, would impact on their children's minds. It might start with children thinking: *oh! My mum is giving effort for our study*. Then children would pay attention to their study. It would be important for mothers to feel comfortable with their participation. Shahana said:

I think we can request mothers to spend more time for their children, such as we can tell them not to watch TV so much with their children, and to sit beside their children when they are studying, to discuss school and study with their children. I think this is how a mother can start her practice.

In the rural context in Bangladesh, mothers have better bonding with their children compared to fathers. I reflected that it would be a very positive initiative if school authorities found ways to engage mothers in their children's education. I also reflected that if such practices became more common it might gradually create societal changes in attitude about the education of girls so making it more possible for mothers like Selina,

discussed in the previous chapter, to interact with the wider community and even creating other possibilities for girls than early marriage.

Include committed parents

Maya, a mother, proposed that teachers could involve parents who were already committed as their support team. She argued that there were parents in the community who were aware and that some were already playing a leading role in the community. Sabina interjected that Maya was a *conscious parent* and was a female member of the existing SMC committee. Maya proposed:

We are from this local community, and we are living surrounded by this school. The school can utilise me to support them to make parents conscious, and I will be happy to do that. I think that if I share my thoughts about children's education and the importance of parental participation, it may influence other parents to think about their children's education.

Maya talked about the benefits of sharing experiences with neighbours about children's performance, as they would meet each other several times every day. Parents in their neighbourhood would have different types of conversation, she said, but conversations about children's education were very rare. But she argued children's education could be included in normal daily conversations. She added:

In everyday conversation conscious parents could share their experience with their neighbours, like: My son is doing this, this is his school performance, and this is the way I am helping him in his study and communicating with the teachers. If you can do this like me, your son also will do the same.

The teachers picked up on Maya's suggestion and discussed people's natural tendency to follow others in their neighbourhood. They expressed their hope that if parents who appreciated the needs of schooling engaged with other parents they could influence those who were not taking care of their children. Emdad said:

If we can encourage our conscious parents and engage them to share what they are doing with their children and their role in their children's education and use the educational topic whenever they meet others, it will bring change.

I reflected that these suggestions offered a very positive way to turn around the negatives that often arose out of social gossip. Looking back at this report now I wonder if a new kind of *discourse* might emerge, one that affirmed the power of parents to make a difference in their children's education, perhaps even one that affirmed the value of further education for both boys' and girls' futures. Perhaps the encouragement of such simple conversations could provide a strategy to develop community engagement, and the deliberate involvement of parents who were already aware and concerned could be the first initiative to do still more.

The discussion then developed with suggestions to involve other community groups. Participants proposed the inclusion of local government bodies which were working with the rural community and implementing sector related government agenda. It was pointed out that parents in the rural communities are key beneficiaries of the local offices. Participants variously mentioned that the agriculture office worked with farmers, fisheries with fisherman, and livestock with cattle owners. They also identified other public service-oriented offices like health, social welfare, and family planning. Teachers pointed out that parents were getting various kinds of support from these offices for their family needs, and so these offices could play a significant role in talking to parents.

Strong leadership

Throughout the discussion most of the participants, parents and teachers, emphasised shared responsibilities, affirming that responsibility should be come from both parents and teachers together. However, they expected someone would need to take the initial initiatives and then most of the participants talked about the head teacher. For example, Afsar, a teacher, stated:

Teachers can make a plan for increasing parental involvement, but the head teacher needs to take steps for implementation.

Bilkis, a parent, also expressed her opinion:

Teachers should take the first step for communication with each other for getting any changing initiatives, and Head Teacher would be the key role player in this regard.

As the head teacher is the administrative leader in a school, he has the key role in taking any actions by the school for communicating with and involving parents. Without getting permission from the head teacher, assistant teachers cannot do anything. Moshir said:

The head teacher needs to take initiatives to develop the parental involvement process because administratively we are his subordinates. As an assistant teacher, I may not be able to take any actions until hearing from my head teacher. Other assistant teachers are not bound or will not feel interested to co-operate with my individual efforts.

In the discussion no one seemed to consider that the SMC could play a role. Afsar said:

In any decision-making process we need their commitment, but in taking any academic improvement initiatives we can only share with them. Then they can join with us or not. They can help our changing process and can be part of that involvement process, but expectation from them for this kind of initiative would not be rational thinking.

Jabed stated:

I have doubt about members of SMC. They do not endeavour to take initiatives. From my experience, I rarely saw any actions taken by the SMC, so that it is not wise to expect any efforts from them.

It was clear that participants' experiences led them to have little hope in SMC to create change. It was also clear that they expected the leadership to rest with head teachers. The next chapter describes how one head teacher did indeed take such leadership.

Aspirations - and future action?

The discussion I have reported about ways to improve communication is admittedly only aspirational. It could be said that the suggestions were only words and that real change would require actions as well as words, and that the participants might simply return to their previous practices when I left the field. However, many of the participants in my study had acknowledged that they had never really thought about parental engagement beyond considering parents' attendance at school programmes. As they talked to me and to each other they were beginning to explore different dimensions of the concept. As they

listened to each other in our final group discussions they began to pick up on each other's statements and to collaboratively explore new possibilities. In this way they were already beginning to step outside the prevalent discourses that they had initially fallen back on. They were communicating with each other and so laying foundations for a possible working relationship. To my mind that held the seeds for change in action as well as in aspirational talk.

The seed was admittedly tiny. However, the next chapter reports very strong action that was already taking place through the initiatives of one head teacher. His example is an illustration of what the seed could grow into.

Chapter Eight: Creating Space

Head teacher is visiting different places like the tea stall, home and the place where people gather in mass. He is trying to make us conscious and involve us. I do not know what types of response he is receiving from us. Now it is own turn to cooperate with him because he is trying to do better for our school and our children.

So far as I know this is the first time one student got GPA- 5 from our school. This happened because of his leadership of school practice, cordiality with his work and communicating with the parents.

(Community voices)

The previous chapter concluded with the participants' suggestions for improved communication. They put forward a range of possible initiatives and also affirmed that head teachers' leadership was necessary before ideas could become action. This chapter reports initiatives that were taken by the head teacher and teachers of Prerona School. What made participants from Prerona School different from others was that they predominantly reported the changes that are happening in their school and community rather than describing problems.

The chapter centres on the activities of Iftekhar Zaman, the head teacher. His actions and beliefs are reported, as is the impact of his initiatives on parents, students and the teachers in his school. It first reports initiatives he has taken with parents, including his development of the process of home visits. It then examines his relationship building with the wider community. Next it looks back in time to examine how he built a relationship with his teachers and the challenges he encountered. Finally it reports changes he has made within the school itself.

Prerona School is one of the five schools I studied in the upazila and so the school and its community face similar problems to those described in the previous three chapters. Therefore, the emphasis here is on Iftekhar's response to those problems rather than

analyses of the problems themselves. Iftekhar's report of his motivation and actions dominate the account but I also report reactions from parents and teachers.

Feeling the absence of parents

Iftekhar reported that from the time he became a head teacher, he considered parents as one of the most important support teams for his school improvement initiatives, especially for caring for students' activities at home, as well as for and overall schooling support. He stated:

From my teaching experience, I realised students' schooling depends on two environments. One is the school environment, and the other one is the home settings. If I only change the school environment and do not consider my students' home environment, then we may not get success. To improve students' home settings, I focused on parental involvement in our schooling system.

He reported that his previous teaching experience had made him aware of the value of parental support at the same time as familiarity with the region led him to realise that parents were very often unable to help their children. He realised he needed to find a way to activate them into the team that would support their children. He used a local saying to describe the importance of parents and home for student learning: (শক্ত দাঁতের জন্য যেমন মজবুত মাড়ি দরকার) *Teeth can only be strong enough if they have the foundation of a good jawbone.* In his use of the metaphor he was referring to the school and its teachers as teeth and the home as the necessary jawbone.

Iftekhar reported that he had encountered a number of problems in his school that made him see it as vital to work with the parents. First he was conscious of the small number of students in his school and he wanted to increase the number, and so he started talking to the parents. The comments cited at the top of this chapter would not have been made at the time he started. He shared his bitter experience of comments from the parents about his school and his colleagues. "One parent," he told me, "was saying there is no proper teacher in the Prerona School to teach his son in a good way". He reported that the comment not only made him unhappy but also inspired him to do better for his school.

Iftekhar recounted how he tried to find ways to bring parents to the school. He organised a parents' meeting at the school aiming to discuss parental responsibilities for their children

schooling. However, the small number who came disappointed every teacher in the school. Iftekhar recalled:

On that day we were well prepared to welcome them and fixed our agenda of what we would discuss. We waited for the parents like scavenger birds. We received very few parents on that day and some of those were not on time. So that programme was not like as we expected.

At this stage Iftekhar was very aware of the gap between his expectations of parental engagement and the reality that parents were busy with their work and not knowledgeable about their children's schooling. He said:

Parents in this area were like sleeping, their eyes were closed, and they were not looking at anything in the school and in education. My intention was to make them awake, to switch on their thought, unlocking their potentiality and create a space in their view of their children's education and schooling matters. Then they can decide, in their way, what they can do for their children schooling, and at least communicate with us when we invite them for communicating.

He pointed out that he was conscious about his school context, and aware of limits to what he could expect from his parents:

It would not be possible for me to make this school like an urban school (*he mentioned a few of the countries' famous schools*) and it would not be wise to expect similar behaviour from these local parents to what urban parents usually do for their children's education.

He realised that invitation alone would not bring parents into the school and achieve what he was expecting from parents. A new strategy was needed.

Finding a basis for rapport

The poor response from parents had disappointed Iftekhar especially since he had prepared a welcoming environment for them. As he was from the region he knew parents' attitudes, but he was shocked. He explained:

I had such experience about the parental response, since when I was an assistant teacher in my previous school. At that time our head teacher was the key initiator.

However, this time the parental response hurt me a lot: it was very tough for me to accept because this time *I* invited them.

Iftekhar spent time thinking about the situation and planning how to increase parental presence. He realised that without making a relationship with them it will not be an easy task for him to bring parents into school programmes and engage them in their children's schooling. He then sat with his teaching team to seek their opinions and suggestions for the next step to build relationship with the parents. Various teachers offered their views about using a home visit to building rapport with the parents, but they did not show willingness to be involved. Iftekhar recalled:

I arranged a meeting for discussion with my colleagues for fixing the next step so that parents would be able to respond spontaneously. Most of my colleagues put their opinion on a home visit and yard meeting (উঠান বৈঠক). I was delighted to listen to their impulsive thoughtful contributions. But they confined their contribution to sharing thoughts about a way: they were not adding anything about how they could get involved.

Iftekhar reported that was not downhearted after receiving such response from his colleagues. His persistence was provoked rather than daunted:

When I received silence responses from both parents and teachers, this condition pushed me to change this picture. I believed I could start alone for the next steps, and other teachers will involve themselves in my initiatives when they felt ready to become involved.

He decided to act alone in his way and he quoted a line from one of Thakur's poems which influenced him to start alone:

যদি তোর ডাক শুনে কেউ না আসে তবে একলা
চলো রে

If anyone does not accompany you, step
out alone

Before actively setting out to communicate directly with the parents, Iftekhar focused on creating a welcoming environment in his school for them, where they would feel comfortable about visiting the school and communicating with the teachers and even share what they expected from teachers for their children's education. He reported that when he had tried to understand the reason of low parental response to his invitation, he had

realised the gap between the parents and school. As a first step, he considered that showing proper respect to the parents might reduce the gap and make a bridge with the parents. Parents in this area, he said, were leading their life very simply and usually were busy with their work. They wore traditional dress all the time so they felt they could not fit into the school environment with their traditional dress and rural manner of behaviour. Iftekhar shared his thought that parents' socio-economic status might make many parents hesitate to visit the school and talk to teachers. (Similar parental thinking was discussed in the previous chapter). Iftekhar therefore arranged a formal meeting for discussing this issue with his teaching staff and requested them to treat all parents as the guardians of a student, and not by their dress or occupation. I observed that to show respect to the parents, he always requested them to sit in front of him when they would visit for various purposes, although they felt hesitant to sit. He also asked his colleagues to treat them the same way:

I requested to my fellow colleagues that whenever any parent visit me and if there is no empty chair then the teacher should stand up and ask that parent to sit to show respect. So that parents can feel their importance, and this will lead them to think positively about school and teachers.

Likewise, Iftekhar started showing respect to the parents by offering tea and biscuits when someone would visit. And whenever he met with the parents at any place on his way to and from school, he would talk with the parents with a smile and chat generally. When it was time for him to depart, he would request the parents to visit the school to get to know the teachers and find out about their children's progress. He recounted:

I always invite parents to visit the school to have a cup of tea with me. Sometimes I tell them that we had bought a kettle and tea bags after electrifying my school, it was a new addition for making tea and they are invited to see how we use them and take tea with us.

I reflected in my field notes that Iftekhar was not only requesting respectful behaviour from his staff, he was also maintaining respect in his own behaviour. He was trying to set an example to his colleagues. I noted also that creating patterns of respectful and positive behaviour towards parents was seen by him as a fundamental basis for his strategy of developing rapport with parents.

One step forward

Iftekhar reported that his initial driving aim was to reduce the gap between the school and parents and create a relationship with the parents that would make it hard for them to ignore school invitations. As he was a new head teacher of this school, he considered he could take the opportunity to meet parents for the first time at their house. In addition, he wanted to visit different students' homes to examine the actual learning environment in the home setting and how parents played their role in their children's education in the home environment. He shared his memory of his expectation:

I knew my visit would impact on parents' minds because it rarely exercised in our region. This visit would be a new experience for the parents.

He was deliberately selective in his first attempts for conducting a home visit. He chose those students who are not regular in class attendances, low performing students in class and those who were not doing well in the exams. He recalled:

I selected students for a home visit who were irregular in the school and are not active in the classroom activities. I also selected from the previous records of their results. After making a list, I started to visit those houses to meet with their parents and see their home activities.

In addition before visiting a home, Iftekhar would try to get information from the students who were neighbours of the students with irregular class attendance so that he could make a plan in his mind before meeting with the parents. He shared that one day he noticed one girl student had not come to school for three days, but she had been a regular student in his class. He then asked other students to find out what had caused her irregularity. Iftekhar recounted the information he gained from a neighbouring student and his subsequent action:

That girl got injured when she was helping her mother in a housekeeping task; she was crushing spices with the *shilpata* [শিলপাটা], a local instrument made from a rock which is used manually for making different spices. The instrument fell down suddenly on her leg and it was wrenched. I visited that house to see the girl and talked to her family.

Iftekhar stated his belief that it creates a tremendous impact on both the family and the student when a teacher cares about any student's health condition and visits their house. He added that any news, whether it is right or wrong, flows very quickly throughout the community, so the kind of initiatives he was taking reached to other parents and community people, which helped his work.

Iftekhar acknowledged that during the first few visits he had problems knowing how to start his conversation with the parents. He was not sure what to say or how to behave with them. Sometimes he felt indecision about entering a home. He recalled:

I have no hesitation to share with you that in my first few visits, I was not well organised. Sometimes I was not clear about what I am going to discuss with the parents and what will be my approach. However, I just carried on meeting with the parents.

He reported that he overcame the problem simply by continuing his mission. It was his oath to himself that he would just continue his steps for building rapport with the parents. He recalled his first meeting with the parents and the conversation was not long. He continued to try to improve his way of discussion with the parents and built up his confidence. He remained mindful of the topic he needed to discuss and would try to make them free to talk to him. He said:

I never discussed any negative things about any student initially with the parents. I always started with the positive things, and as a result they felt comfortable with me and shared different things about their children.

He reported that as he took these first steps he received positive reactions from parents, and that gave him more courage to persist with the home visit activities. As he shared his experience of home visits Iftekhar's expression reflected his enjoyment of his visits to students' houses and the various experiences he had gained from the students and their guardians.

What he found in his home visits

Iftekhar reported that he would find two common scenarios during his home visits. Mostly he found that both parents and students went to bed early and when they heard his arrival they would wake up, somewhat mystified by his presence:

I found both parents and student rubbing their eyes, and they were saying ‘we are just in bed now’. Parents could understand the reason of my presence in the evening and for that reason before I had to ask them anything they were pledging me that next time they will change their sleeping habit and promising that they will care about their children’s educational activities at home.

He reported that parents would normally quickly explain that their children were studying “just before half an hour ago”. He would reassure them and during the following conversation they would all come to a verbal commitment about how to take care of the children’s study.

Another common scenario that he found in many houses was that most of the family members are watching various TV programmes with their children, and those who did not have TV would move other houses with TV facilities. Most of them were watching different serial programmes which they did not want to miss. Iftekhar concluded this was evening practice. Yet it was the school’s expectation that students should be spending their time at their study table and parents would supervise their children’s homework activities.

I found several family members enjoying TV programmes along with their children. When I saw parents in front of the TV they felt shy and willingly promised to me that they would not do that anymore. I requested them to work out a limited time for watching TV.

Iftekhar recounted how he would talk about the importance of time for study and try to convince parents to think differently about creating enough time for study instead of watching television. He found that most parents responded to the need for study time, and would promise to reduce the time for watching television. At the same time he recognised that in the rural context parents have limited opportunity for their recreation and so affirmed the importance of recreation for both parents and students: he would negotiate a compromise asking parents to minimise the time for watching television and to increase study time at home.

In addition, during his visit to homes Iftekhar would check the condition of students’ study places, as he believed a suitable study place was important. With the permission and co-operation of parents he would view the place where his student was studying and if needed suggest possible rearrangement. He talked about his belief that such small changes could

create a tremendous impact on the student's mind and motivate the student to study. He told me that he focused on the study area because he found a number of houses where there was no study place for the students. He shared an experience where the student's home was one room that was the bedroom and there was no separate study place. The student would usually study on the bed at night, and his parents would sit beside him. The student would be disrupted when his parents talked or would want to sleep early. Iftekhar recounted:

I found a chair in that room and then I requested whether his parents could manage a table for him. They were convinced by my request and understood the importance of a table. And they did organise a table for his study.

I reflected in my journal that it was common in this rural region for parents not to consider the importance of study place: that it was partly the effect of poverty but also a lack of awareness of what study entailed. I noted that Iftekhar had understood the economic capacity of the rural family and he had negotiated a means to ensure a minimally secure and comfortable environment for the student to study. I reflected that while poverty was clearly an ongoing problem it did not have to be an absolute deterrent for developing a home study environment, but that there was need for someone like Iftekhar to negotiate possibilities.

Reception from the parents

It is standard practice in the community for people to offer something to anyone who visits the house for any purpose: it is in the way of welcoming and showing respect to the visitor. Iftekhar reported that he often found hesitant faces when he visited. Some of the families would not be able to offer any chair for him to sit on to talk to them, so he would need to sit on the toll (টুল), a small stool made of wood, or sometimes on their bed. He would comfortably take his place on the toll or bed and carried on conversation. Iftekhar said:

I could imagine their inner feelings when they could not offer me anything to sit on. I tried to make them easy by my approach so that they did not feel uncomfortable with me anymore. It did not matter to me where I sat; the important issue was conversation about their children's education and their collaboration.

Some parents felt bad when they could not offer snacks. Sometimes they would quickly prepare types of food that are not normally offered to a guest. Iftekhar shared his reaction:

My visit was sudden so that they were not prepared to offer me anything. I never refused to take their food, whatever they offered. Sometimes I felt full, and my stomach rejected more food, but I never refused because they might be disheartened.

However, after a few visit he found students' families were ready to offer him tea and biscuits:

Whenever they heard the sound of my motorbike they would know that I was coming and I found them ready to receive me, and I found them offering me tea and a biscuit.

Iftekhar shared his understanding with me that the students and parents were not only ready to offer refreshments but they also wanted to show him how their practices were changing. He felt that the majority of the parents were showing their respect for his efforts to communicate with them and make a relationship that would help them understand their children's educational needs.

Parental appreciation

In my informal conversations in the community I found that parents were happy with teachers' initiatives for their children education and were trying to make changes from their side. They were starting to believe that there were changes in their children when they received support from both parents and teachers. Momin, a parent as well as an SMC member, stated:

Visiting by the teachers at any student's home has a positive impact on the student's mind. When they can see both parents and teachers are trying to do something better for them, it has a positive influence. I can see my son's promptness with his study and little changes in his habits.

Overall parents seemed very pleased with the home visits. Parents would talk spontaneously about the activities of the teachers and their initiatives to encourage their children's day-to-day practices. A few parents shared that their children were spending

more time with study and less time outside the home, and that they can see the changes in their children. Kamrul, a parent, said:

Nowadays, my son is not going to bed early but studying till late at night. He feels that at any time his head teacher may visit to see his activities. At the same time we are motivating him.

In contrast, a small number of parents were not yet convinced by his initiatives. Iftekhar recalled:

One day I visited a house to talk with the parents and see the student's activities. After getting his father's permission the student took me inside where his father was laying down. After seeing me he did not stand up from his bed. He shook his hand at me and his expression showed he was annoyed by my visit.

Iftekhar talked about the differences within the community and how not all people were hospitable or willing to think about schooling and admitted the need to recognise their opinions. He further acknowledged that there were a few parents who did not like his home visits although they do not directly show their negative attitudes to him. He considered he still had further work to do.

Changes after the home visit

On the whole Iftekhar was happy with his initiatives, and he shared his opinion that “my initiatives do not become purposeless”. After several home visit, he noticed some changes in parents' attitudes and behaviour, especially the mothers. He claimed that at least he was breaking the shyness of parents' communication with him. He shared a memory from his first visits:

At the beginning parents showed surprise on their faces. Mothers especially would not come in front of me to talk. They used to talk to me from behind a door and those who come in front of me used their veil for hiding their face.

He noted the changes: mothers were not using a veil and not hesitating to talk to him.

Similarly when Iftekhar first visited any home parents would hide their children's activities from him and would say that their children were studying “just before five minutes”. Iftekhar considered parents thought that he might blame them for not taking

responsibility for study and that was why he was not receiving any real facts from them. As was discussed in previous chapters teachers in this region normally communicate with parents if there is something wrong. However, Iftekhar gradually won trust and co-operation. He recounted:

After a few visits, parents could understand my motive for visiting; they could understand I came to support their children education rather than criticising them. For that reason, parents started to talk openly about their children's activities at home and their problems.

Students also became at ease with him after a few visits and would strategically utilise their time with Iftekhar, sometimes discussing the problems they were facing at school, and sometimes bringing their books to seek help for solving a problem. Sometimes students would talk about the limitation of support from their parents and request their head teacher to tell their parents that they needed paper and a pencil, or even request him to tell their parents not to send them to work in school time. Iftekhar sharing his reflection about the ways visits had changed:

At the beginning, I noticed that both parents and students were busy with arranging snacks for me, and working out where they would offer me for sit. After few visits, they changed their attitudes and were less worried about my reception. Students would come with books to solve their problems, sharing some of their school problems and parents would seek advice from me about how to support their children at home.

He continued:

A few parents requested me to describe their role and responsibilities at home with their children. They argued that if I described their responsibilities in front of their children, then it would be easy to implement them next time.

Iftekhar considered that he was beginning to be seen as a reliable person by both students and parents and that they were becoming comfortable to share their educational concerns with him.

Other forms of personal parental communication started after the home visits. Parents started casually communicating with the school. When they would come to the

neighbourhood of Prerona School, they would call in to exchange traditional greetings. Iftekhar shared his mobile number with the parents and requested them to call him anytime: if he could not answer because of class or another programme then he would call them back. He stated:

Parents were calling me when they found any gap in my visits to them. As this is a big area, I need to cover the whole area by rotation, and for that reason, automatic gap are created. Parents would worry about why I was not visiting. Sometimes parents would call me to invite me to visit and sometimes just to ask about my health.

During the period of my data collection, Iftekhar arranged a parents assembly in his school. A large number of parents, community people, and young people attended on that day. The presence of the parents, community people and young people was significant. There was a festive mood throughout, and young boys were busy with decorating the school and welcoming parents and senior people of the community. All other teachers were actively ready to receive parents. Parents were also actively participating. Teachers shared their traditional message to the parents about their responsibilities, and parents seemed to be very accepting of teachers' suggestions and promising that they would make it happen. After the function food was offered to all attendees. I found Iftekhar busy with offering food to the parents in a friendly way and addressing parents by their children's names like Babuler Maa (Mother of Babul), and parents were responding to the teachers with a smile. I noted how the entire function demonstrated their bonding with one another.

Parental Acknowledgement

During the period of my data collection, Iftekhar was continuing his home visits and allowed me to accompany him. Normally he conducted his visits after school hours, travelling on his motorbike and visiting different houses. It seemed like he was well known to the parents, and he would call the student's name when he entered each house. I noticed that he did not ask for directions and knew exactly where his students lived and made no mistakes in calling their names. The way he entered houses and the way parents received him evidenced he was not a stranger to those homes. The informal flow of conversation showed intimate relationship. Everyone had a smiling face, and it seemed to create a celebratory moment. I reflected that the way the parents were glad to receive their

head teacher in their house was like the way they would receive a visiting member of their family.

When I was with him Iftekhar entered the home of a class X student, calling his name, Shahin. He entered the Shahin's study place directly and found his student was studying there. He received an update of his student's progress, and then the parents joined him with a smile, looking very happy with the performance of their child. The father of this student earlier used to send his son to help him in his business, a small grocery shop. However, after the head teacher first visited his house he was motivated by him and stopped sending his son to see to his business. Kamrul, the father, explained:

This is the third time the head teacher is visiting his house to get an update of my son's performance. From his first visit, after receiving counselling from the Head Sir, I realised the importance of my son's education and stopped sending him to my grocer's shop to help me. I am trying to giving him space for focusing on his study. Though I cannot spend time with him because of my busy day, his mother is trying to spend her time with my son.

It was evident that Iftekhar's home visits created changes in parents' understanding of their children's education and in their behaviour. I noted it as a reflection of positive modifications in the community which started from individual parents.

Similarly, Iftekhar's home visit influenced individual students' behaviour and helped them focus on their study. Parents found their children were studying rather than wasting their time here and there. School attendance was becoming more regular after a home visit. Some parents reported that when they requested support for any family matter from their children, they would reply that they are busy with their study, and promised to do the task after finishing. Saleha, a parent, reported:

One day I requested my daughter to help me with my housekeeping work, but she was saying she would join to help me after finishing her school work.

Several parents I talked with acknowledged that the seriousness that came after the home visit by the head teacher. Sattar shared a conversation he had with his son after the head teacher's visit. During the visit he had talked about son's daily activities in the home after school, sharing both positive and negative aspects with the head teacher in front of his son. He reported his son's reaction:

After Head Sir's leaving, my son was saying: 'Why did you share all those things with my sir? You can hide something from him and also request me to improve later. Please do not share anything more next time; I promise I will not do anything negative anymore, I will be strict about my study from now on.'

Iftekhar took me with him to a girl student's house and before we entered he explained why he was giving importance to her. She was from a low-income family, had two elder brothers who are studying in an upper class and her father was a local small business owner. Because of the poverty of the family and because the girl had an eye defect her father was not giving importance to her study. However, the head teacher had observed her classroom activities and considered she had more potential than she was realising. He told me:

I noticed that the girl was always trying to say something, trying to answer the question and trying to participate in any discussion in my class. However, she would begin to reply but could not complete her answer. I talked to her first and decided to talk to her parents. Now she is improving in her classroom performance.

As we were on the way to the student's house having this discussion, two other teachers and Momin, the SMC member, joined us with torch light and wearing warm clothes. After entering the house we did not find her father, who was in the tea stall near the house, so Iftekhar started talking to her mother. After a while, her father, Lavlu, returned home when he had been informed about the presence of Iftekhar at his house. Lavlu acknowledged that he had two elder sons, who were studying in the higher classes and he had been focussing on their study only and had been less focused on his daughter, but he was happy to see his daughter going to school. He confessed that Iftekhar's visits had opened his eyes towards his daughter's education and changed his mind and now he was giving the same importance to his all children's education. Lavlu added:

I never had any teacher before in my house to talk about my children's education when my two sons were at the school level. In contrast, our current Head Sir is visiting different student houses, and his visits are making various changes. His convincing advice brings my change of mind, and now I am also focusing on my daughter's education.

Iftekhar told me that the appreciation he received from parents and the changes they undertook was like a reward and inspired him to work further with them.

Initiatives taken by the parents

As I travelled around with Iftekhar to various homes I saw a range of new initiatives being taken by parents. Parents were eager to show him their efforts for participation in their children's education. Reduction of television time was one common family initiative; others were the provision of warmth and nourishing food.

Watching television programmes is often the only entertainment available in rural communities in Bangladesh. Many parents shared that they had reduced television watching time for their children as their first initiatives for offering a suitable environment for study. Saleha explained her strategy for her daughter: "I only allow her to look at the programme *Kiron Mala* (*a most popular Hindi serial with Bangladeshi mothers*), as I also cannot stop watching that serial".

Other parents reported other ways of trying to offer their children space for their homework. Some parents had changed their evening routine to provide more time for their children. Kamrul reported:

We changed our dinner time as a strategy so that my son can spend more time for his study. Because, after taking his meal, he cannot study anymore. His mother is sitting beside him during his study time so that he can give his full concentration to his study.

It was winter in Bangladesh at the time when I visited various students' homes with Iftekhar, and the temperatures were low. Housing conditions in that area are not very good, and the wind blew easily through the walls into the single room of houses. In that situation it was not easy for the students to continue their study at night. Parents were trying to make their children study comfortable and were finding warm clothes for them, even though they often needed to sacrifice other requirements to manage that. Saleha explained:

In this winter season it is too cold, and you can see our house is not in a good condition; a slight draught always blows through our room so that it is so tough for

her to sit on the chair and study. I bought a pair of stocking to make her comfortable during her study at night.

Parents' financial situations did not easily allow them to think about their children's nutrition when they were struggling to provide basic food. But now several parents reported that in order to ensure nutritious food for their children they had stopped selling their eggs in the market and were offering them to their children, as a means to motivate their children to study.

Parents were starting to contribute at their own levels. And parents who had not previously shown interest in their children's education or checked whether they were going to school or not, now started to show their interest. Sattar said:

I never wanted to know anything about my son's education, but now I am a little bit curious to know about his study and activities. Now I am showing my interest in my child's education. Like, before going to school I say bye to my son. I take his books from him and provide food when he returns from school. At the same time, I talk about school activities and want to know about how was his day at school.

After my travels with Iftekhar I noted the impact of his visits in my field journal: fathers were not sending their sons to work, mothers were not involving their daughters in their daily housekeeping work, space were being created for children to study. I also noted that both parents and teachers could see the changes in the children and openly acknowledged that such initiatives by the parents impacted on students' study. I also realised I was seeing the fruits of a sustained effort by Iftekhar and his teachers. In order to better understand how the head teacher had managed the transformation, I asked about the history of the school and of Iftekhar's role within it. Iftekhar talked to me about the need to win the trust of the wider community.

The need to engage the community

Like other rural schools in Bangladesh this school was established through the initiatives of community people to meet community needs. For that reason schools can be said to belong to the community people and teachers are responsible to the community. Iftekhar argued:

When teachers can realise the invisible pressure from the community then they become regular in their attendance at school, perform throughout school hours and show their seriousness in their work in the school.

However, there had been a long back history of the conflict within the community in this school region. Teachers had experienced the conflict within the community and had felt the lack of unified direction, leading to irregular attendance and lack of professionalism. An elderly community person, Moinul, attended a group discussion and describing the previous history and recent changes:

I can remember a short time ago a small number of people had their footprint in this school and teachers were running their school activities as they fancied. No one was here looking after teachers' school activities. However, those days are history for our school; now our school is moving forward and hoping for the best.

Most of the participants I interviewed from this school shared thoughts about the sufferings of the school because of the community conflict. One result of the extreme level of conflict within the community was failure to recruit a head teacher for fourteen years after the previous head teacher had been sacked. The school operated with an acting head teacher, teaching standards suffered and limited improvement work was implemented. During group discussion, various participants drew attention to the downhill turn of the school because of community conflict. Iftekhar stated:

Because of the conflict within the community, the school authority attempted several times to recruit a head teacher but failed to reach a unified decision and so was unsuccessful in recruiting. After fourteen years, the school authority recruited me. However, some of the community were not happy with my recruitment: they kept a distance.

From the school records Iftekhar noted the yearly decrease in the number of students. From discussion with his colleagues, Iftekhar discovered:

Some of the students transferred from my school and were attending different schools which are far away from this region. The transfer decision was made by their parents from the pressure of their community as a result of the conflict.

I received views from various participants about the reasons students were attending different schools. Teachers claimed that when groups within the community failed to gain mastery in the school they sent their children to a different school as part of their revenge and protest. Community people claimed that the results of their school were not good and teachers were not serious about their profession. Tomiz Uddin, a community person, said:

I do not hesitate to recognise the conflict inside our community. As a result of that conflict some community people insisted that parents should send their children to a different school to show their revenge. Moreover, teachers' lack of seriousness about their profession and absence of quality of education was the reality in our Prerona School. Therefore, some parents sent their children to different schools.

I learned that conflict within the community arose when various community people failed to gain representation on the SMC committee. Regions are divided into several sub-regions, and people from every sub-region wanted representation. When they failed to achieve it, the conflict started. The conflict continued after Iftekhar's recruitment. He recounted:

Those who failed to appoint their choice were not pleased with me at all. Those who were deprived by my appointment criticised it and raised questions about my ability as a head teacher instead of helping. The biggest problem was that they were doing that behind my back.

Iftekhar added that some community people were not initially willing to see him succeed as a head teacher, and tried to make him fail. For that reason he did not get their cooperation. However, he began to take initiatives for improving the relationship with the parents, teachers and the community, aiming for their eventual engagement in school activities.

Iftekhar told me he kept the notion that school belongs to the community firmly in his mind and determined to meet with the community people as means to show his courtesy and seek their support. He arranged an informal meeting, a tea party (চা চা), to convey his greetings and share his plans for the school as the newly recruited head teacher. He recalled:

I failed to get a response from some of the community people; they did not attend the school after getting my invitation. They indicated they were busy elsewhere. At the same time, I sensed their lack of interest to the institution and in me. They denied my invitation, but not cordially.

The way forward

Iftekhar explained that he had realised the importance of the community participation in his school and looked for a strategic way to involve them. He reported that he had selected influential individuals in each section of the community who would be able to contribute something to his school. It was a kind of power mapping. He explained:

At the initial stage I picked selected people who represent one small community, had influence on their community people and had followers. To reach them I probed for their interests and soft spots to start a conversation with that area rather than about school improvement matters.

In his list he included different classes of people, especially those who were involved in the establishment of the school, and set out to meet them individually at times that were convenient for them. He would start a conversation about the time of the establishment and that person's contribution. He would then share his plan for the school and point out areas where they could contribute their ideas and time. Iftekhar recounted:

I reminded them that Prerona School is their school, and this school is for fulfilling their local demands and their children are studying in this school. I tried to convince them that the reflection of their ideas is vital for operating the school, and their contribution is paramount.

His presence and his respect influenced the people. The majority of the community people he met with promised him that they would stand beside him as head teacher and play their supporting role. Tomiz reported his reaction to Iftekhar's visit to his house:

It is a rare scenario in our region that the head teacher is visiting our house and seeking our help in his school operational process. When we failed to meet their busy schedule, this head teacher visited me for my help. It makes me proud and feel honoured.

Iftekhar's strategy was to meet community casually, using his time on the way to school and returning to talk to people. He would also go to various tea stalls where, as he said, "people come to have tea and the place never gets empty". As he was new in the school and in that area, he did not know all the people and so would introduce himself to them and create a relationship. He would offer tea to all present in the tea stall and just talk with them. He explained:

I thought a tea stall would be the best place to meet common people to talk. I found that in the tea stall people spend their leisure time and gossip, so I took the chance to meet with them. When I spend time in the tea stall with them, they became free with me and considered me as their own. For that reason, they expressed their opinion freely.

In addition when he would go on his home visits to various students' houses he would also talk with the community people nearby and just chat about the school and his plans for the school. Sometimes interested people would accompany him on his home visits. He reported:

Normally I start alone for a home visit, but sometimes people from the community would join me and spend time with me until I finished the visits.

Iftekhar repeatedly acknowledged that improvement of his relationship with the community helped in planning and carrying out his school initiatives.

As well as spending time in tea stall conversations Iftekhar would use any other valuable opportunity to create rapport with the community. When he spoke he tried to present himself as less important than the community people and prioritise their role in the school development process. As head teacher he would position himself as a facilitator and merely the full-time person assigned to play the active part in any development initiatives. Iftekhar provoked the people to think about the school in a new positive way. He would use motivational words to convince the people that Prerona School belonged to the community and teachers were working in the school on their behalf to enlighten their children and society. He explained:

I know very well that this school was established by the initiatives of community people. If I respect them and give them space, then they feel honoured. I have

nothing to lose. I am a head teacher, and I will remain so. They appreciate my words and now they expect things from me.

He added:

Some community people expect nice words and respect from the teachers, nothing more than that, and I was trying to offer them. Those make them happy, and I was spending my time on making them happy, nothing else.

Throughout, I noted, Iftekhar tried to understand people's expectation and to work in ways that could make them feel appreciated and useful. I reflected in my field journal that this showed the importance in leadership of finding out what people demand from teachers and using that as a basis for creating a good relationship with them.

Utilising young strength

Since his appointment, Iftekhar has organised a range of school programmes. To help him make the programmes successful he has called on the services of the community's young people in a variety of ways. He has developed a practice of involving young boys in the community who have dropped out of school, never been to school or are studying at higher levels. Whenever a function is organised by the Prerona School they join willingly to make the programme successful, decorating the school for the programme, distributing invitation letters, providing technical support for school equipment and carrying out a wide range of other tasks. Iftekhar reported:

I involve ex-students of this school and other young boys in the community in different school functions. I invite them and get different ideas for making the programmes successful.

Iftekhar added that, above all, he sought to address a social development need by engaging the younger generation in his school activities. Eve-teasing is a serious problem at the outskirts of his school as it is elsewhere. He explained that he actively targets those who were suspected of engaging in such activities and others who could play a role to prevent eve-teasing in that region. He stated:

One of my key aims in engaging the young generation in school functions is to give them interesting occupations and to encourage them to respect others. I thought by engaging them I could reduce eve-teasing in my students.

During the period of my data collection, the school organised a meeting with the community people, where they invited me to observe their programme. I found a number of young boys very active with various activities. They were operating the sound system and using the projector with a laptop, and I found they were enjoying their work. Most importantly, they were participating in developing the well-being of the community and sharing that undertaking with parents and current students. In the process they were finding out what types of roles they could play not only in school initiatives but also in the community.

Being part of the community

Iftekhar told me that that he was very aware that a few steps and small activities could make change. He stated: “It was always in my mind that respect creates an accelerative reaction from those you show it to”. He reported that he started receiving recognition back from community people within a short period. Community people started communicating with Iftekhar about various things. They began to make courtesy visits to the school to meet with the head teacher and would start familiar conversations with him. In addition, community people started valuing him for his position and considering him as part of various social issues they would discuss. They began to seek his opinion on any issues within the community. Iftekhar expressed his feelings to me:

As I am a head teacher I feel honoured when they invite me at different times and consider me as part of the community. That is my achievement: the way they are treating me.

He added:

One day, I was invited to a meeting organised by the community people to discuss various community issues and develop a further community plan. The meeting place was an open area where most of the community people were sitting on the mat, and there were limited chairs for a few people including me. I felt honoured to be there; they welcomed me and started their meeting after my arrival.

Iftekhar informed me that the way he was participating in the various affairs in the community should be the role of a head teacher. He needed to belong the community;

otherwise, it would not be an easy task for any head teacher to operate his institution efficiently.

Furthermore, Iftekhar started to receive invitations from community people as well as from parents to their various family programmes. He was receiving invitations to the kind of functions where people invite their close relations and people from their caste. He told me how much he was enjoying invitations for attending different functions, adding with an ironic smile:

Nowadays my expenses have increased after attending different marriage ceremonies, and boys' circumcision (সূন্নতে খাৎনা; *a Muslim religious process*) programmes, as I need to offer gifts. However, I am enjoying a lot to be a part of their functions.

Iftekhar appeared a little hesitant to share other things that were happening to him in the community. He said he was not sure whether they were relevant to my study. I encouraged him to continue and he said:

One day two older community people come to school and requested me to go with them. One the way they told me about the event they were celebrating. When we arrived I saw the people gathering and I spent time and chatted with them. Finally they requested me to receive a portion of meat. I could not refuse and wanted to pay them for it, but they refused to take the payment. I was honoured to receive such behaviour from them.

The event that Iftekhar described is part of village tradition. Sometimes the people buy cow all together and divide it among them. The invitation indicated that the people considered Iftekhar to be part of their community and were beginning to expect him to participate in every social event.

Engagement by the community

From the time Iftekhar came to Prerona School, he was concerned about the shortage of classrooms in his school and the shortage of teachers. He told me he began to plan a new classroom and the recruitment of more teachers and waited for a chance to bring up the issue. There were not sufficient funds in the school to build a new building (a tin shed) for

a new classroom and the SMC did not seem interested in solving the classroom crisis. Iftekhar decided to share the problem with the SMC, but he was unsure if he could convince them, as he knew about the shortage of funds. He decided to wait till he made rapport with the SMC. In the rural context in Bangladesh there is unwritten custom of a donation¹ system for being appointed as a teacher in a school and the practice is that the donation is distributed between the SMC and the head teacher. Iftekhar used the time when an assistant teacher was recruited. He set out to convince the SMC president and the community to utilise the donation for classroom expansion. He showed me the classroom proudly and looked very relaxed as he told me the story:

I used only one word to the SMC president to convince him. I told him that if he does not take the donation and utilise the donation for classroom expansion, then the community will keep his name forever, and he was convinced. The way I represent the proposal to the committee, they could not deny it.

In the previous chapter I discussed the social problems of the rural context, such as child marriage, eve teasing, students' involvement with work, boys spending time outside during study time as well as others. Similar issues occurred in this region. Moreover, this area is largely inhabited by the people of the Hindu religion, and they work as fishermen, barbers, fullers, shoemakers and some other poorly paid occupations. They are treated as a lower social class in the community and treated as a minority. Their daughters are more harassed by the young boys and child marriage is a common scenario.

Iftekhar's active engagement with the community has helped to make community people aware of the problems with child marriage and helped young boys to realise that eve-teasing is a problem. I learned that various members of the community would take responsibility for convincing parents and discuss the negative aspects of child marriage as well as the positive side of children's education. They would take various initiatives against child marriage whenever they hear of it. And since their involvement in school functions, the boys have not been getting involved eve-teasing and sometimes they would actively protest against it. Tomiz, a social leader, reported:

It was a common scenario that students were spending their study time here and there, watching TV or gossiping. The scenario has changed now; elder village

¹ *Donation*, a form of expected payment for favour, is well practiced in the recruitment process in the non-government schools to fulfilling the school needs.

personnel are convincing the students to return home and pay attention to their study. A co-ordinated effort is visible now in this region.

As explained previously, I joined Iftekhar in his home visits and I noticed we had someone else with us most of the time. I mistook him for a teacher, but after some time I discovered he was Momin, a member of the SMC. Momin explained:

I often spend time with the teachers like a teacher. Whenever I can see our teachers in our area for any activities, I tend to accompany them. At the same time, I visit school randomly to know about their operations and offer myself for any help if they need it.

I noted that when the SMC members and community people observed the activities of the head teacher, they were inspired to also become involved. Like Momin, they would travel sometimes with the head teacher during his home visits. I reflected that Iftekhar had indeed begun to mould the community into one that was engaged with schooling. However, it was not only the community he had to win, he also needed to forge alliances with his own teachers.

Inheriting a school of poor practice

A number of parents and community people shared their memories of how the school had been in the fourteen years under an acting head teacher. They claimed there had been no leadership and no commitment from the teachers to the school, students, parents, and community. It was stated that the teacher had just maintained the formalities which they could not avoid. It was said to be common practice that teachers were irregular in their time attendance and that school hours were not properly maintained. Iftekhar also reported that after he came he experienced similar behaviour from teachers and was informed about past practices by the fourth class employees, students, parents, and the community peoples. He recounted:

After my joining, I received information about teachers' practices of not finishing school hours or the syllabus properly. Some information I received from my office staff. Some other information came from parents and other people who complained when I talked to them. A few senior teachers tried to continue their previous practice which confirmed the information I received from different sources. They came to me

after five or six periods, sat in front of me, missing their class and their body language indicated they were ready to leave. When I understood their motive, I requested them softly to continue their next classes and complete their syllabus.

Iftekhar had told me of his attempt to include his teaching staff in his various initiatives because of his belief in teamwork. He shared his ideas and thoughts with the teachers and sought their co-operation. Sometimes he talked with all teachers together and sometimes individually. However, Iftekhar did not receive any spontaneous response from his team. It seemed to him that his colleagues wanted to retain their existing practices and did not want change. He found some senior colleagues were comparing their experiences and indicated they were satisfied with their practice and did not want to take on extra responsibilities with the head teacher in his new initiatives. Some of them considered his initiatives as a disturbance. Iftekhar gave me a broad summary of what he gathered from his teachers' attitudes:

They seemed to be saying: We are not feeling any problems with our previous as well as our current practices. That is the way we operate our school and we are not experiencing any problem. We are hoping to continue the rest of our careers in the simplest way and without facing any hassle.

Shabuj, a teacher, made a similar comment to me:

Everything was going well, and we never had any problem. After joining, our Head Sir started pointing out various issues that he wanted to change. Initially I wondered why we needed to change, but a realisation comes later when our Sir was trying to motivate us and showing us the importance.

Iftekhar reported that he used patience with the teachers and had taken his time to involve them in his initiatives. He started conversations with them to understand their perspectives about the school, about how they had operated the school and how they could make progress, like achieving results in the public examination, improving the attendance rate of the students and other issues related to the school. As he gained a picture of their attitudes and practices, he sought their opinions about what they could further contribute and their commitment to an improvement process.

Iftekhar found challenges in taking his next step for creating change. He reported that he had carefully thought through the challenges at the time of his recruitment and he was

committed to creating progress. Iftekhar acknowledged that the problems he faced were not entirely unexpected, as he had learned from other head teachers about the challenges they faced in similar contexts. One problem was resentment from senior teachers.

Iftekhar started working hard to motivate and changing other teachers' minds. He told me about some practical steps he took:

In our class routine, I would include my name in the first period and last period to motivate other teachers to work hard and finish the last period, and that did not allow them to come to me and claim difficulties to finish all the periods. I am conducting classes like other assistant teachers in my school whereas in other schools head teachers do not conduct a class in a regular basis, but mostly just conduct a period as a courtesy.

Personal conflict

Before joining Prerona School, Iftekhar was an assistant teacher at another school in the same area and had worked for last twelve years. He was well known in that role to all teachers from Prerona School. So he acknowledged that it had been a challenge for him to start working with the staff. Most of the teachers were his seniors by age and teaching experience. Some of them were excellent in their subject knowledge. Most importantly the teachers were from the school region and had been working at the school from its beginning. Iftekhar could appreciate the mental attitude of those older teachers and how they viewed him as their new administrative head. He described the nature of his previous relationship with them:

Before joining Prerona School, I spend many times with the teachers from this school who are my colleagues now. We attended different training programmes together, worked together and I had a friendly relationship with them. I could understand their current mental situation of accepting me as their administrative head and working under me. I was aware of what they thought and it was a challenge for me always to keep that in my mind as I dealt with them.

Iftekhar found two of his colleagues had been competitors as candidates for the post of head teacher. Those two teachers had served in the school for a long time and one had

worked as acting head teacher. Iftekhar appreciated that it was not easy for them to accept him as their chief. Iftekhar shared his understanding of the situation:

Those two teachers do not receive me in the usual way; because of me they had lost their chance to be a head teacher in this school. At the same time, they had invested in gaining support of influential people who were in the recruiting process. I could realise it was like flying across the face to them.

Discussion with my Bangladeshi colleagues confirmed that such resentments are not at all uncommon and that Iftekhar did indeed face serious challenges from his senior staff members. That he did resolve these conflicts are evidenced by the accounts of how teachers including the previous acting head, did eventually join him in his home visits.

Involving his teachers in home visits

A home visit is not part of a teacher's responsibilities in the context of Bangladesh. It is a voluntary initiative by a school and so depends on the school's and individual teachers' willingness. Iftekhar reported that he was aware of the limits of how much he could insist on such actions from his teachers. Because of that he developed the practice of sharing his plan with the teachers and asking for the names of the students who had been irregular for long time and who were not performing well in class. Then he started visiting homes following the list he received. After conducting a home visit, he would share his experience with the teachers. He explained:

I always shared my experience of what I got from the home visit with my colleagues. I wanted to update them and to make the process of the home visit clear to them. I believed that the example of me as head of this institution conducting home visit alone would influence my colleagues to join me. I was hopeful of getting a response from them. I wondered in my mind how they could be silent without joining me.

Within a short period of time, Iftekhar noticed a positive reaction and some curiosity from the young teachers of his school. They started showing interest in joining him for a home visit. He would then sit with them to make a new plan with them. One of the teachers, Farhad, shared his reason for becoming involved in the home visits:

As Sir is head of our school and is trying to do something better for our school and trying to make a good relationship with the parents and community people, it was not easy for me to stay without joining in with him. His steps attracted me to join him and I always thought that if he can do something for better practice, then why not me. I found this action has an interesting charm it gives me the opportunity to meet people and know their daily life. I took the chance to get in touch with the people.

Teachers were mostly from the local community where the school is situated, and, similarly, students were also from the surrounding areas. When Iftekhar conducted his home visit in various regions he would find one teacher who had a house in the particular area he was visiting. Parents were more familiar with their local teacher, so when the head teacher made his visit to a student's house, the students or the parents would tend to share their experience with their local teacher, saying the head teacher "visited our house last night". Nadim was described to me his reason for involving himself in the home visit process in this way:

It was a kind of shame for me that Head Sir is visiting my area and I am not with him. As I am from that particular area it is my responsibility to show respect and receive him and be with him during a home visit. At the same time when our Head Sir can come from a long distance for visiting different parents, why can I not do that? If I do not do this activity, then community people will also criticise me.

Iftekhar reported the changes in attitude among his colleagues about involvement in the home visits. Teachers started home visits in their own area. When assistant teachers began their individual initiatives for a home visit Iftekhar would be informed by the students in the class as well as by the teachers. After hearing of teachers' interest in a home visit, Iftekhar would sit with them to plan so that they could carry out home visit successfully. To begin they would identify irregular and low performing students in various classes. Then they would consider the various areas and assign enthusiastic teachers who lived nearby. When Iftekhar described their action plan, I noticed that this time he was using the term *we* rather than *I*:

We would make a plan for the home visit where we divided up our area to what was close to each teacher. Because of that teachers can visit different houses based on

their convenient time. Now I only meet with those who are visiting their fixed areas, and I can join them during my home visits.

Shabuj reported that after identifying a student for a home visit they would select any teacher for visiting that house, and after the visit they discuss what had happened among them in order to update everyone. He added:

Whenever we need to select any student's house for a visit, we point out in which area that student is staying. Then find out the teacher who will be closest to that student's house, and we request him to visit the house.

The teachers also informed me that they have developed the practice of meeting with different parents simply to create a relationship with them. They said that whenever they meet any parents, they now start to have a causal chat with them which leads to creation of a good rapport. Nadim described the process:

We communicate with the parents in another way; we visit different houses to meet with the parents on our way to school and when we return from school and that visit is just for saying hello to them. This way we are making a relationship with them.

Keeping in touch with colleagues

Iftekhar reported that once he had developed a relationship with his colleagues he decided to spend as much time with them as he can. He explained he aimed to build a good rapport with them, minimise the relationship gap and create an enjoyable working environment in the school. He started spending time after school hours with the teachers so that teachers could also see the school as their recreation place. He explained:

The question was in my mind: why were teachers wanted to go early from the school? I offer tea and biscuits to all teachers and we mostly talk about educational matters. By doing that we can exchange our ideas with everyone, and I can see everyone is happy to spend time together.

Iftekhar started to celebrate the different occasions in the school premises with the teachers, such as Eid day, Bengali New Year and teachers' birthdays. By organising such kinds of celebration in the school, Iftekhar tried to make it an enjoyable place for the teachers. I celebrated Eid day during my data collection period and on the day, I contacted the head teachers who were in my participants' group to share a greeting with them over

the phone. I found almost everyone was celebrating their Eid day with their relatives, which is normal. However, I found Iftekhar was an exception; he was in the school at that time with his colleagues and some of the community people. I asked him why he was in the school on the special occasion. He replied:

In my calendar year, I usually spend most of the days with colleagues because of my official duties. So why not this occasion? I am trying to create a relationship with my colleagues which go beyond an official one. Celebrating this occasion is a message to them that our relationship is not only official but also has a different meaning; it is not less than family bonding.

I found that sharing and receiving ideas was Iftekhar's basic way of developing trust with his colleagues. As a head teacher he would often meet with various officials and attend formal functions on behalf of the school. He would share what he learned with his colleagues and ask for their opinions. One day I called Iftekhar to ask to spend some time with him in the evening. I found him at school. At that time he was sharing information that he received from the District Commissioner's Office that day. He told me:

I am at the school now with my colleagues and sharing about the discussion and the direction I got from the District Commissioner's Office. In this time I am getting my colleagues' opinions on the directions and about how they can make a plan for implementing the instructions.

At the time I met Iftekhar and visited his school he had already won the collaboration of his staff and the greater part of his community. While the primary focus of my research was investigation of how he engaged parents I was also curious about how he managed to assert his leadership in the early days after his appointment. Iftekhar talked to me about how he had developed his working environment in the school.

Setting the office in order

Iftekhar reported that he had identified a number of basic problems that needed improvement and he had made a priority list. He reported that the teachers' office room was totally disorganised. He said:

You would be shocked to see my previous office room. It was difficult to get what was needed on time; nothing was organised. I tried to bring a discipline to my office in order to offer a comfortable place for work.

He explained that teachers were sitting anywhere they could find a place and the office assistant needed to work around them. Office stationery, student registers, attendance books and teaching aids were all over the place, so that it was not possible to easily locate documents and teachers were spending much of their time looking for the attendance book when they were preparing for class. Sometimes teachers were late to class.

Iftekhar recounted how he had re-organised things, introducing seating arrangements for the teachers and staff, specifying places for various documents and teaching materials. He used cupboards to create partitions to make spaces for teachers, office staff and his own place. He told me about the hope that inspired his re-organisation:

I took the chance to convey a message that I would not blow away with the wind. I would take different initiatives for bringing discipline to the school, and I tried to convey that message to the teachers and other staff by my initiatives.

He added:

I started the first changes where I did not need to spend much money and which were fairly easy to do. That is why I chose to decorate our offices, and it created a positive impact on teacher's daily activities.

Iftekhar reported that little changes began to occur in the work discipline of the teachers. They began to spontaneously keep what they needed for teaching in particular places. Nadim, an assistant teacher, stated:

It was an active effort by our Head Sir. We were facing difficulties but never did anything to change. Some kind of laziness was in us before. Our Sir organised not only our office room but also reshuffled classrooms. There was no separate room for the science students. Our Head Sir took the initiatives and repaired one of our rooms.

Getting electricity into the school

Iftekhar told me there was no electricity in the school when he came. Classrooms without power become insufferable during the summer period which is the dominant season in Bangladesh. Both students and teachers suffer without electricity when the average temperature is 35 degrees Celsius and above. Usually five students are allocated to one bench but when there is a large number of students in one classroom, six or seven need to be seated in one bench. Iftekhar recounted:

The situation was intolerable for both teachers and students. In summer, it was disappointing for me to see that students and teachers were in pain in class. At the same time, I was helpless when I saw students escaping from school after tiffin period to avoid suffering in the classroom. I decided I had to change this scenario.

Iftekhar shared another important reason to get power connected to the school. The current mission of the government of Bangladesh is to create *Digital Bangladesh* and to implement its vision it is introducing digital technology in various sectors. The education sector is considered as a high priority. There are projects developing digital teaching materials and the government is offering laptops and computers to schools. ICT training programmes are being run throughout the country. The government is beginning to send official communications to schools through email and advising schools to develop websites. However, the government only offers this support and training to schools that have electricity and Prerona School was missing out on various available projects because of its lack of connection to electricity. Iftekhar explained:

I was not getting any computer and laptop offers from the Government because we did not have electricity. My teachers were not receiving any training offers for digital content because we did not have a computer or a laptop. I needed to visit computer shops which were not nearby in this village for downloading various circulars from the government because some circulars were available only online.

Iftekhar reported that the need to access electricity was a major early challenge he needed to tackle. The hardest part of connecting power was to find the money as Prerona School did not have a healthy fund. He recounted that he had talked about the importance of electricity with his teachers and shared his plan, seeking help from them. But he did not receive a ready response from his teaching staff. He recalled: “When I was seeking

teachers' support and ideas to make the initiative successful, teachers demotivated me instead of spreading their helping hand".

Farhad, an assistant teacher, smiled shyly when he recalled why he did not show courage at that time:

We were suffering from the problem, and we waited for government assistance. We never thought about fundraising efforts or believed they could work. The reason was that we all knew our community people well. Nowadays community people expect something from school but do not want to contribute. So when Head Sir was sharing with us about making a fund from the community, we did not believe it would work. It was beyond our imagination that our Head Sir would have the capacity to convince community people to help. Truly speaking he did a great thing; you rarely have such an experience.

Iftekhar reported that the negative reaction from his colleagues did not demotivate him, rather it led him to forge ahead on his own. He selected people from his locality who had the mentality and ability to donate to the school. Initially, he met with people from the immediate school community, but got little response from them. Then he decided to go different places within the upazila. He chose the Union Parishad chairmen and several wealthy people as potential donors, and visited them alone to convince them about how their contribution would work and the changes that could be made. Most importantly he received positive responses from various Union chairmen except the one from his school area. He acknowledged:

I felt helpless and alone when I was visiting people. It would have been a great support to have my colleagues' presence during negotiations. My strong determination kept me on track. I took my colleagues' negative attitudes in a positive way. I took it as my chance to prove myself to the teachers and show them that willingness and effort can make a change.

He did gain the funding and he involved all teachers and SMC members in the process of connecting and applying electricity. They bought fans for all classrooms as required. The classrooms gained a new appearance and ran more efficiently. Iftekhar reported that he put all donors' names on an honour board to show respect and gratitude. I saw the board in the Iftekhar's office when he told me the history.

I reflected in my journal that Iftekhar's way of thinking and working style was a little different from that of many other head teachers. He seemed to be always trying to find a different logic and to make things happen. I noted that it indicated his knowledge of leadership potentiality. I was particularly impressed by his own description of his goal:

My aim in these change initiatives was to give a clear message to my colleagues that I will not be stuck with the current situation and I will always drive the process of change. For any betterment of this school I need their support, and I was making them prepared for this.

I reflected that to make his colleagues mentally prepared for being part of the changes in his school; Iftekhar was trying to create their trust and confidence in him. I understood that he considered these as essential elements of building a relationship. I recognised that there seemed to be powerful inner instincts that motivated him and drove him to continue his efforts for school betterment.

A sense of satisfaction and on-going responsibility

Iftekhar confided that his current position is the highest in secondary school sector, and that he was very happy to be a head teacher in his school. He said that his happiness and satisfaction motivated him to continue to work for positive change in his school. He suggested that if he could create the right kind of environment and so set a positive example for teachers and parents, then education would mean more to them, and he would get their support. He said:

I have nothing left that I need to achieve in my life, especially in my teaching profession. One year back, I was a senior assistant teacher, and now I am in the highest position of this school. What else I can get in my life? I would like to utilise my achievement in a proper way, and I am trying my level best to do that.

I reflected at length in my journal about the way Iftekhar related his satisfaction with his current position to a sense of inner accountability. I noted that he had come to the school wanting to contribute and was still showing his gratitude for his position and for the support he was now getting by continuing creative work for the betterment of the school. He seemed humble about his work, saying:

I am taking my actions for change from the best of my knowledge and doing the initiatives that I think are necessary for my school. At some point, I may perhaps do it wrong, but I think what I am doing is for the betterment of my school.

I also reflected that Iftekhar did not have previous experience as a head teacher and had not received any training. Moreover, he was not following any abstract or academic ideas in his process. Rather he seemed to be driven and sustained by his determination, his commitment and an innate ability to work with people.

I also reflected on the way Iftekhar was spending so much time in the school with the teachers and with the community people. He seemed to recognise a link between change and time and to believe that any kind of change would be difficult without spending time. Iftekhar had told me that he habitually came to school on time and stayed throughout schooling hours. After class hours, he would spend time with the community people. He once shared his wife's comment: "The way you are spending your time at school," she said, "seems like you are the only one head teacher in this area who needs to spend most of his time on school activities, I have not seen any other head teacher like you. And are not other head teachers operating their schools?"

I thought about the way many teachers tend to put forward their limitations and use them to justify why they are not able to take any initiatives for improvement. Sometimes they argue that their weaknesses prevent them from following administrative orders properly. Iftekhar shared a saying that is common among teachers: normally people have two hands, but teachers have three hands, with the extra one for making a plea (অজুহাত) .

I also reflected how lucky I had been to get Prerona School and Iftekhar in my project. I found Iftekhar positive from the beginning of our conversations. He seemed to consider it his duty to overcome limitations. He told me:

We always talk about our limitations, like, we do not have this, and we do not have that. We never say that we have little interest and commitment to change our current situation. We may not show our positive attitudes and further steps for overcoming our situation. From our limitations, we never tried for good initiatives, and we never tried to do anything in the proper way.

In the previous chapters I reported teachers saying that parents were not coming to school when they were invited to the school functions, and this was the most common comment I heard from the teachers I interviewed. However, I found a different attitude with Iftekhar. He reported his belief:

Parents are eagerly waiting to receive the call from the teachers; it just needs the right approach to invite them (ডাকার মত ডাকলে আসে, ডাক শোনার জন্য সবাই কান পেতে বসে আছে).

To illustrate his point Iftekhar shared an incidence from his experience. He had organised a meeting with the parents and community people. In the process he issued invitation letters with his personal signature and seal. He distributed the invitation letters through the peon and orderly from his school. Everyone was happy to receive the invitation letter and committed to attend the programme. However a difficulty arose with one community person. That person denied receiving the invitation letter, pointing out there was no seal on his invitation. As soon as Iftekhar was informed by his staff, he set out to talk directly to the person. He reported:

I issued a letter for every parent in my school; there was a mistake in one letter where my staffs missed putting my seal. When I heard that, I reached that person by my motorbike instantly to solve the problem. He was impressed with my presence. It was not a big issue, but it could have been a problem if I had not got there on time. This parent has an influencing capacity in this community.

His immediate action indicated that he believed that he was the one who carried the responsibility for leading change. He wanted other teachers in his school to play their supporting role, but he acknowledged that the foremost responsibility rested with him. He said:

আগের হাল যেদিকে যায় পিছনের হাল সেদিকে যায়

Referring to a saying about ploughing the field, he was suggesting that he is the leader who needs to break the ground so that others can follow. He quoted another saying: “For cooking something we need to light up the stove, and I know I am the person who has to light up the stove”. If something in his school needed doing it was he who carried accountability for starting it. In the Bangladeshi educational context, a head teacher is the

key person for operating a school and the way the school operates depends very much on his willingness and values. Iftekhar explained his choices as follows:

I want to live with the people who are hopeful and do not want to live with disappointed people.

Emerging themes

If I had not met Iftekhar this study may have been one of repeated failures to engage rural parents in schooling in Bangladesh. In Chapter Five I reported a series of common complaints by teachers about the indifference of parents to their children's schooling and parents' justifications and excuses. I suggested that these are common discourses within Bangladesh. Iftekhar's example disrupts these discourses, showing them to be habits of mind that can be changed. In Chapter Six I examined the differences in cultural capital that divided teachers from parents and the ways that cultural values and habits created complex interplays of respect, dependency and blame. The initiatives taken by Iftekhar suggest that schooling could acknowledge and accommodate various different kinds of cultural capital. They also suggest that relationships between teachers and parents do not necessarily need to be burdened with complexities, that trust and open communication can be developed.

Iftekhar's example also highlights the power of the head teacher to make a difference. Bangladesh schools are acknowledged to be autocratic with power residing in the head teacher (and sometimes in the SMC). The right choice of leader and the provision of useful training thus seem essential elements in increasing parental engagement in their children's education. These issues are further discussed in the next chapter.

When I look back over Iftekhar's story, five key leadership characteristics are apparent. The first is a high level of personal energy and goodwill. The second is a genuine respect for others and a willingness to show it. The third is the courage to lead by example. The fourth is the ability to take well considered risks. The fifth is the sensitivity to allow spaces for others to do their part. The way Iftekhar drew on these qualities and the practices that grew out of them allowed him to create relationships and an environment where parents, illiterate as well as literate, could learn more about their children's education needs and collaborate with the school in supporting their learning.

The next chapter draws together the various issues and findings that have emerged from my research and discusses their implications.

Chapter Nine: Conclusion

I began the first chapter with an account of my ride in Kudrat's rickshaw and his gently dismissive question "Why should I need to visit the school?" In the chapter before this one I recounted my rides on the back of Iftekhar's motorbike as he visited parents' homes on foggy winter nights talking about individual students' needs and conferring with parents about how they could best support their child's study. In a way these two rides could figure as bookends to this research journey. When I entered the field I mainly heard stories from teachers about parents' failure to respond to school invitations and their apparent disinterest in their children's learning, and stories from parents about the pointlessness of engaging in education either because of their sense of inferiority or because they were happy to rely on teachers. As I continued discussions with participants and explored the conditions in which parents and teachers lived and worked I found that the situation was more complex and that there was a range of practical problems, habits of behaviour and prevalent social discourses that impeded communication and collaboration, and that at some stages of my investigation appeared as almost insuperable barriers. In the final stages of my investigation the head teacher, Iftekhar, demonstrated that the problems and obstacles, while very real, did not mean that parents did not care about their children's futures or that they could not collaborate with the school in supporting their education. He showed how the school could take responsibility for meeting parents on their ground and for creating the genuine dialogues that would allow parents to engage.

The implications of this study might thus be summarised as follows. Iftekhar's initiatives show that rural parental engagement is possible, despite illiteracy, and the dialogue between parents and teachers in my last group discussion show that positive communication is possible. Therefore policy-makers and researchers need to think beyond deficits, and recognise problems associated with first-generation-schooling. There are flaws in the current schooling system and problems in society that need dialogue between parents and teachers. There is need to develop appropriate leadership practices for relationship building and need to develop strategies for facilitate community communication.

This chapter recapitulates the problems that impede engagement in rural schools in Bangladesh and discusses how these may indicate the kinds of initiatives needed to make

engagement possible. It takes the work of Iftekhar as an example of approaches that could break through the problems that are repeatedly reported as parental indifference by policy makers, teachers and some researchers. From this basis it offers a model of how parental engagement in education can be developed in rural contexts. It then examines implications of this study for policy and practice, and suggests areas for further research. It concludes with reflection on my own learning through the study.

Policy and practice

Both government policy and the history of rural secondary schooling in Bangladesh emphasise the importance of parental and community engagement. Many rural schools were built and initially funded by community benefactors. Education policy (2010) states the aim of making good citizens and equipping all people with the knowledge, skills and human values that will allow them to contribute to their community and to the country. Policy is aspirational: its enactment requires sustained and effective effort by teachers and parents. In Bangladesh, as in many other countries, a gap remains between policy and the realities of school experience and the gap is particularly wide in rural regions. Unskilled teachers and unaware parents are blamed for the gap. Active engagement by parents in their children's education is regarded by policy makers, and by teachers, as a vital element in achieving educational outcomes. International research supports the idea that parental involvement impacts on students' academic success.

Two institutions that are seen as key means of encouraging parental involvement are the School Management Committee (SMC) and the Parents Teachers Association (PTA). SMCs are officially seen not only as means of managing non-government secondary schools but as opportunities to engage community people, especially parents. However, most participants in my study did not see members of SCMs as agents for parental involvement with student learning. On the other hand Iftekhar showed how he managed to win the support of his SMC in strategic school improvements and even engage some in his home visits. I saw no operation of PTAs, and was even told by head teachers that they saw their existence as a paper exercise. Parents' lack of their knowledge about their possible roles and responsibilities appeared to be one reason for these bodies not achieving their potential contribution to parental engagement. In addition most peoples in the rural context are struggling with the basics of survival and so often do not pay attention to their children's education.

But engagement is needed

My investigation revealed that despite difficulties in achieving it, parental engagement in education is needed in the rural context in Bangladesh, and that involvement in student learning in home settings is important as well as in school settings. It also indicated that communication is needed between school and home. A number of major issues requiring such collaboration were identified.

Teachers find it hard to provide means for students to complete their learning from each lesson at school. Teaching loads, the large number of students in the classroom, the pressure of finishing syllabus within a limited period, students' irregular attendance at school and varying levels of student ability in one classroom create difficulties. As a result teachers expect students to spend time for study at home.

The general expectation from education is that children would grow up with knowledge and with the social norms to fit them ethically and productively into society. However, participants in this study voiced concerns about students' social behaviours. Students' involvement in various anti-social activities is a concern throughout the country and features prominently in media. The problems include not only absenteeism and failure to study but also addiction, eve-teasing, and even crime.

Students in secondary school are teenagers, and are in a sensitive stage of development. They want to express themselves freely. In addition, popular media bring different cultural values into their lives and they often struggle to locate their sense of identity. Many feel isolated. Their curious minds often prompt them to become involved in activities which go against social rules, such as addiction and eve-teasing. Besides help with academic matters, they need emotional, mental and physical support from the family, teachers and community. Many of these young people also face extreme poverty in their daily life. They need an understanding but guiding hand on their head and quality time with their parents.

The government of Bangladesh has a target to reduce the dropout rate and therefore provides a stipend to students. However, the widespread practice of private tuition is working against government policy. While policy is trying to minimise students' educational expenses and give relief to parents, private tuition is adding extra pressure and more educational expenses. Parents assume that their children would not be able to get

good marks in the examination without private tuition and most rural parents do not have the capacity to provide private tuition. Therefore, many choose to send their children to work rather than to school.

A co-ordinated effort by community and schools is needed to stop eve-teasing and providing an education friendly environment for the girls in the community. There is potential for school to take the initiative in bringing parents, community people and teachers onto one platform to try and change boys' attitudes or at least to find co-ordinated ways to stop harassing activities. Other researchers (such as Islam, 2012) have argued that eve-teasing can be reduced by building community awareness and engaging local elites. The government also (MoE, 2016) has tried to provide a safety net for girls by circulating an order for school assemblies and symbolic action involving the teachers, parents, and SMC committee in order to raise everyone's consciousness.

Underlying realities

Policy and both parents and teachers acknowledge the importance of parental engagement. Schools seek to promote engagement by inviting parents to specific programmes. However, this study identified contextual, and particularly socio-economic, problems that blocked parents from engaging.

Understanding engagement

I initially found that in most cases both parents and teachers had limited understandings of the concept of engagement, and both talked about the difficulties within existing circumstances. Parents' economic pressures, their awareness of their own illiteracy and their sense of their position in society often made them feel unable to communicate with teachers, and teachers argued that busy schedules prevented them from initiating other initiatives than those already undertaken by their school. All the schools in my study were taking initiatives for engaging parents but all except one felt they were not successful because of the lack of response and interaction.

Most of the initiatives that came from schools were largely ceremonial. In those programmes schools would present themselves colourfully and teachers would tend to focus on their invited prestigious guests. Although parents were invited to participate there were no real opportunities for parents to interact with ideas of learning or the needs of

their own children. The nature of those programmes did not attract parents to attend, especially at the cost of missing one day's earnings.

This study found that there is limited practice of individual communication and of interaction between parents and teachers. I found that many parents felt powerless about getting involved in their children's education at home or at school. A sense of their position in the community and of their illiteracy tended to keep them away from school, and their lack of knowledge about what their children were doing at school and what they needed to do in order to be successful meant they had no clear basis on which to engage with their children's learning at home. The final part of our group discussions, as well as Iftekhar's example, suggested that individual communication could allow parents to collaborate with teachers in understanding students' needs and could give parents the confidence to engage with their children about their studies.

My study suggests that teachers need to come forward and reach out to the parents, and that can be possible through a communication process. By a continuous communication process, teachers and parents can share understandings of where and how parents can become involved with their children's education, and perhaps discover new platforms for collaboration. This process could lead parents and teachers to re-construct the parental role. Iftekhar's example suggests that personal communication could impact in a positive way and reduce parents' sense of powerlessness. Communication can allow both parties to identify and explain their needs and their understandings of the students' needs, and so enable parents to take active interest in their children's education. At a later stage communication may provide a platform for addressing some of the wider problems within the community. At the wider policy level examples of such communication may allow more specific understandings of the concept of parental engagement, and help shape strategies for encouraging engagement.

Practices that are becoming norms

In the country as a whole parent who are rich and have enough money tend to perceive that educational achievement can only come about by sending their children to renowned schools with high profile teachers. The examination system further impels parents to focus on the results rather than learning. Education then acquires a business shape rather than being about learning. A third party is taking the advantage of the opportunity to operate

coaching centres, and teachers' economic situation is forcing them to become involved with private tuition. Parents who can afford it send their children to private tuition and coaching centres, sometimes in a highly competitive way. As a consequence, despite the intentions of policy and the provision of access to schools, poor people are actually deprived of a full education. Education is seen as expensive.

Most teachers become initially involved with private tuition in order to meet their immediate family needs, and many continue to develop provisions for the future, as there is no limit to perceived family needs. Teachers in my study acknowledged that the weight of private tuition classes often stole their focus from the classroom. At the national level this has led the Education Minister to speak of *dishonest teachers* (*The Daily Star*, 2017, May 22) because they are depriving students from low-income families who are unable to afford tuition.

The government provides a stipend and free textbooks to ensure students from vulnerable families can participate in education, and it allocates a significant portion of the total budget to education. However, because education has become a competitive business, poor parents do not adequately benefit from these measures and government investment in education is not fully achieving its target. Existing laws against private tuition are not bringing about change and therefore the government is reported to be planning to put more punitive measures in the proposed Education Act (*The Daily Star*, 2017, April 28). However in a country with a large population like that of Bangladesh real change needs to come not only from laws but also from the ground up with collaboration of parents, teachers and community and their joint expectation of the support of government officials at field level.

While richer urban parents can show their engagement in their children's education by selecting well reputed schools and paying for extra tuition, poorer rural parents often cannot even pay the school's additional fees. The approaches they do make to the school most frequently are to negotiate reductions in fees. They feel the pressure to take their children with them to work rather than sending them to school.

Life priorities

My study also found that rural poverty was blocking initiatives for parental engagement. The daily pressure to provide food and shelter for the family consumes many parents'

attention and does not allow space for considering any participation in the process of their children's schooling. Illiteracy not only prevents a large number of parents from being able to check their children's study, it also makes them embarrassed about discussing learning with their children and even about communicating with teachers. Parents in this situation are satisfied to see their children going to the school and dependent on the teachers to take care of educational matters.

Parents in this rural setting reported how they were dependent on their day-by-day work and could not afford to miss a day's work. They cannot, therefore, respond to teachers' invitations to attend various programmes. If they are to be involved then schools, parents and other community people will need to create open discussions to consider the merit of the events and how to arrange them at suitable times and dates for working parents. Schools would then need to develop programmes that are meaningful to parents as well honouring the influential guests.

Head teachers and leadership

My study reported the way Iftekhar, a head teacher, disrupted the prevailing discourses of blame. He began by taking individual initiatives and at the same time opening up spaces for parents, community people and his teachers to talk and share their opinions. In this way he enabled various kinds of engagement to evolve out of the grounded concerns and of the local context and the new possibilities that he opened up. In my discussion with him I found that the initiatives that Iftekhar was taking did not come from any theoretical positions and that he had not received any training in head teacher's leadership from any government organisation.

However, he knew and respected the community and its schools and he had strong vision and fierce commitment to doing things better. He encouraged and gently manipulated his colleagues to see the overall existing situation of the school and its community. In Chapter Eight I identified key elements in his leadership practice. They are denoted in *Figure 9.1* and their implications for the role leadership can play in evolving parental engagement are further discussed below.

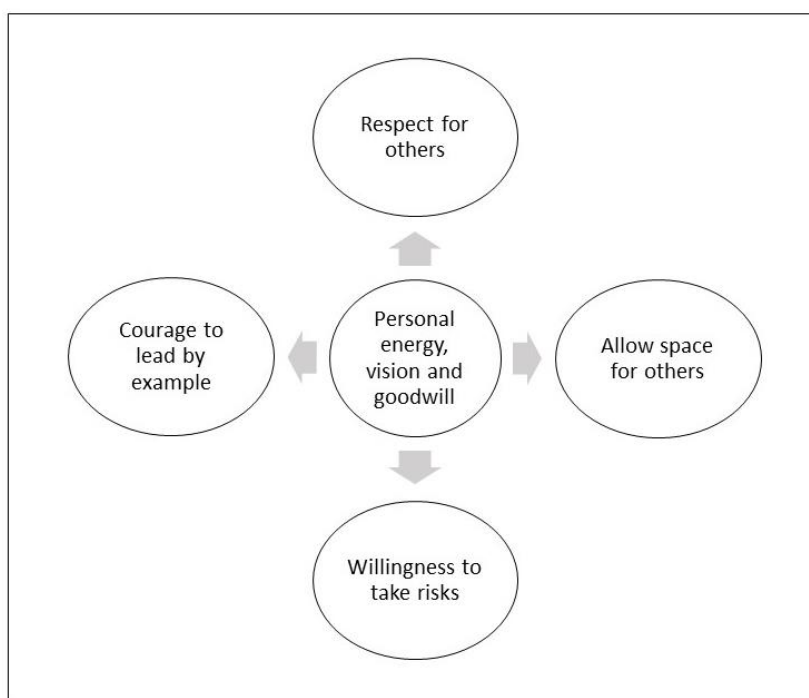


Figure 9.1: Key elements in Iftekhar's leadership

Personal energy, vision and goodwill

Iftekhar took up his role as a head teacher with a vision of creating a school that served its community. His pride in and commitment to his job served as fuel for his initiatives for change. Any rural secondary school in Bangladesh has a range of problems that often makes the task of teaching a struggle. I experienced that teachers often shared their problems rather than discussing possible solutions. Iftekhar seemed to refuse to hold onto a problem without taking an initiative to solve it. He appeared to consider problems only as opportunities for improving the situation.

His inner commitment to develop his school seemed to give him a passion for each step and his joy in each achievement prompted him to take another step. He stepped outside the parameters of usual duty hours to spend time with his teachers and with parents and that additional time allowed him to explore both the problems and possible ways forward. His enjoyment of his work seemed to be reinforced by the respect he received from people in the community and to reinforce his innate goodwill.

These personal qualities cannot be instilled by training but they can be encouraged. They are important qualities to consider in the selection of head teachers and teachers. As a

result of his study of another, urban, Bangladeshi head teacher Salahuddin (2016) also argues that selection of school leaders needs to take account of personal qualities and not just administrative capabilities and seniority. It is noteworthy that Iftekhar's demonstration of these qualities in his practice drew out, over time, similar qualities in his teachers, in parents and in members of his SMC. Perhaps these qualities are not so rare, but they often need to be valued and recognised in order to become active.

Respect for others

Iftekhar's actions and his descriptions were characterised by respect for others. He entered poor people's home, gratefully accepted their hospitality and acknowledged their love and care for their children as well as the constraints of their circumstances. He recognised the importance of his teachers' sense of agency: while he insisted on their performance of their classroom duties, he did not pressure them into joining him in his after school initiatives, but he did share his reflections with them. He also showed respect for the history, values and role of the wider community.

Throughout Bangladesh, community people have been the makers of rural secondary schools. It is a normal expectation from a community that it owns the institution. Land for the school was initially donated by someone from the community, and community financial support and community time established the school and helped it run until it received government funding. In my field work and previous working experience I found community people still had a feeling of ownership. They would still flashback to the days when they initiated the plan for the school and made it happen. Since those beginning some kind of shift has occurred in their relationship, and exchanges of blame minimise the chances for further improvement. As detailed in the preceding chapters a gap has developed between teachers and ordinary community people that has led parents to see little usefulness in sharing their thoughts and that has created negative attitudes in some to teachers and schooling.

Iftekhar recognised the ownership of the community and looked for ways to give back to the people. He knew the community and its cultural practices and reached out to people in ways that were culturally valued by them. He reminded people that the school still benefited from and valued their contribution and was missing their further input. By showing respect and valuing parents and community members he rebuilt frayed

relationships and created a basis for communication. The importance of respect for people and for culture had been highlighted by other, international, research about parental engagement, notably Mapp and Hong (2010), Greenwood and Wilson (2006), Macfarlane (2007) and Riwai-Couch (2014).

Courage to lead by example

This study identified the importance of planning on the basis of acknowledgement of the existing situation. In seeking to engage teachers, parents and community in school improvement initiatives Iftekhar considered existing practices and all stakeholders' attitudes. When he first asked his staff to be part of his initiatives, he received little support. However, he did not stop. His courage, patience and passionate commitment kept his drive alive.

Iftekhar repeatedly explained that his confidence came from his belief that if he started there was a chance for influence others. For example, teachers are very familiar with the term home visit; however, most have limited experience in practice of how to carry one out. When Iftekhar started his home visits alone and started sharing his activities with teachers it opened a window for them to see how a home visit could take place in practice. Iftekhar had the ability to ignite curiosity in others and blow it into a flame. His courage in acting alone seemed to give others the courage to step forward to join him.

Iftekhar also showed courage in leading from the front in teaching practice. It is common practice in Bangladesh for head teachers to stay busy with administrative tasks and they rarely teach classes. However, Iftekhar set an example to his teaching staff by putting his name in the timetable like the other teachers, and even by nominating himself to take the first and last classes of the day. His example influenced other teachers to contribute their part as best they could; it maximised cordial participation and minimised dissatisfaction. His example also highlights that the creation of engagement in a context of apparent disengagement requires courage in taking new initiatives.

Willingness to take risks

Iftekhar admitted that he did not always know how things would turn out when he began an initiative: he recounted that he was not sure of how he should manage the situation when he began his home visits, but he was willing to take the risk and begin. Such risks

were not blind ones: Iftekhar's were based on a clear concept of what he wanted to achieve and on respect for parents' responses and needs. However, there were no guarantees of success and no blueprints to follow. He recounted situations where his home visits were not welcomed. However, he repeatedly emphasised the importance of risking the first step. His approach could be described as a kind of action learning: he thought about his goals and what he knew about the community and its needs, took action, reflected on it, and planned for the next steps.

He took similar risks in approaching influential community leaders, as in his initiative to connect power in Prerona School. It was a significant challenge to organise the huge amount of money involved. The overall context was one of poverty, and many of those who had money and power were in the habit of seeking gain rather than making voluntary contributions. He identified individuals who are willing to become involved in positive initiatives and massaged them into commitment. He succeeded but he was prepared to take the risk of mockery if he failed.

Allowing space for others

Perhaps the most important aspect of Iftekhar's initiatives to develop parental engagement is that he left space for others: first for the parents themselves to find the way they felt comfortable in responding and then for his teachers and community leaders to join him. Despite findings of published Bangladesh research and the expressions of apparent disinterest that I collected in the first stage of my field work, this study suggests that many parents do want to engage in some way with the education of their children and so do many members of the community. It also showed a group of teachers who were expressed very positive feelings about giving full commitment to teaching and to meeting parents on their own ground. The power of Iftekhar's practice was that while he was prepared to take solo initiatives he did not seek to dominate the opportunities he created: he actively encouraged others to also shape the processes of engagement.

While Iftekhar's specific actions might not be suitable for other contexts in Bangladesh, his approach to developing relationship with parents does offer an example of the kind of qualities that would allow other rural head teachers to open spaces for engagement. His example opens up the question of what form rural parental engagement should take.

What shape can engagement take?

When I first talked to teachers I found there seemed to be an assumption that parental engagement entailed attendance at the functions to which schools invited them. A second level of engagement involved supervision of students' homework. According to teachers' reports and my own interviews with parents, both these forms of engagement were rejected by many of the parents in the community. Poverty, illiteracy and the perceived irrelevance of the programmes to which they were invited were named obstacles to such engagement. On the other hand, most of those I talked with seemed to believe that some form of collaboration between parents and school was desirable, even if not apparently possible.

Iftekhar's example and the suggestions from parents and teachers in my final group discussion highlighted a range of forms of engagement: discussions about students' learning needs between parents and teachers in the home or in the tea stall; parents re-arranging facilities and practices at home so that their children's study was supported; mothers, even if they might themselves be illiterate, sitting with their children while they studied; parents resisting the urge to take their children out of school to help them in their paid work; parents keeping their daughters at school; parents participating in school functions; parents seeking advice from teachers; parents and teachers talking together about social problems; yard meetings; discussion about learning at the time of negotiating examination fees; spontaneous chats after the Jumma prayer time; arguing about the cost of private tuition; involving the community to get electricity connected; developing a more responsive SMC; making the PTA work. *Figure 9.2* outlines the varying spheres where parental engagement could take place.

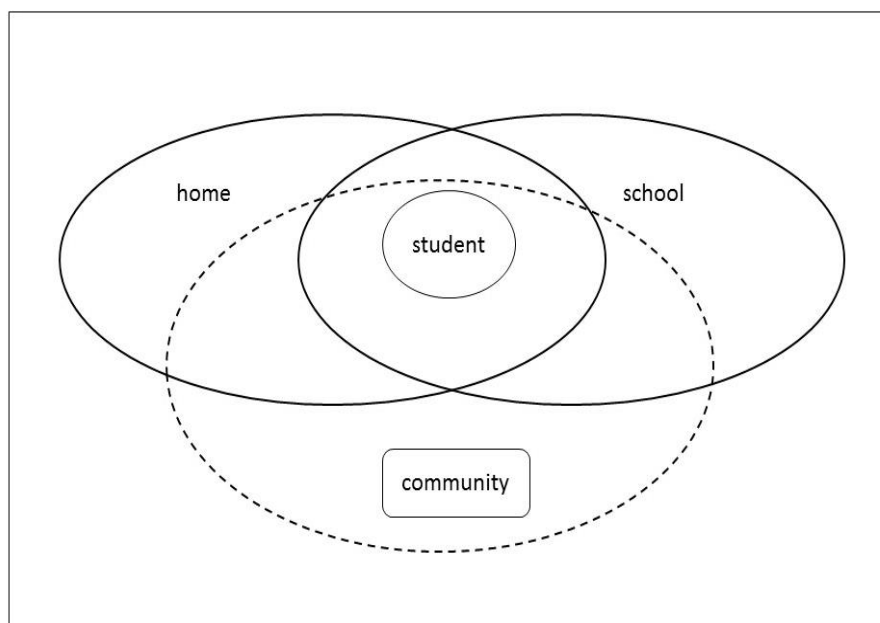


Figure 9.2: Possibilities for parental engagement

The figure suggests that the engagement might be based in the home or in the school or both. Importantly the students' well-being and academic progress are at the centre and parents and teachers communicate to help each other achieve their well-being and academic progress. The figure also suggests that there are possibilities for the engagement to develop into wider forms of community dialogue and collective action that can allow parents, teachers and others to address issues that are important to the safety, education and human development of the young people of the community. Such development of community dialogue and collective action can be seen as potentially increasing the social capital of parents and therefore their ability to engage meaningfully in their children's schooling.

Steps towards change

My study, as well as media reports and published research studies, indicated that in many cases both parents and teachers are busy with criticism of each another, but it seems the criticism revolves inside each group without impacting on the other. It does not contribute towards change but rather blocks any positive steps for solving problems. As a result the problems endure.

Criticism in itself can be useful, but for it to be used positively it needs a safe space where it can lead into further discussion. That space is currently missing in most rural schools.

At the beginning of this study when I started interviewing participants, I found them criticising one another. It appeared to be their usual practice. However, at the end of my field work after long conversations and interviews with the participants from the various groups, I found they were changing their perceptions and attitudes. They started sharing their feelings about their roles and considering how they could improve their situation. They began thinking of what they could do rather than what others should do. They suggested a range of ways they could change their current practices. These were described in Chapter Seven and I discuss aspects of them further below.

Recognition of responsibility

It is often observed that the gap between policy and the practice is the result of lack of processes for implementation. Addressing the gap, policy makers often say that policies are sound, but teachers and parent are not good at implementing the policy in their practice. Policy looks good when it is documented on paper. Teachers raise their voice against the policy makers to claim that the policy has not considered their context and the realities they face. Nevertheless schools take some initiatives for engaging parents in the school functions, and when they achieve little success they blame parents for not responding to their invitation. Parents in turn sometimes accuse teachers of having unprofessional ways of dealing with them. The blame game is paralleled by real problems: rural parents struggle to meet survival needs and illiteracy makes many position themselves as powerless; teachers have busy schedules, heavy teaching loads and low salaries and also struggle with meeting their family needs.

The re-cycling of problems and the passing on of blame does not allow initiatives for change. Nevertheless, rural students deserve to get good education and to be supported by both family and school. The cycle can only be broken if one or more of the groups takes the responsibility - and the accompanying vulnerability - to create change, as Iftekhar did. Iftekhar's position as a head teacher made it acceptable, if not easy, for him to address the problems he saw rather than merely complain about them, and this study, like that of Salahuddin (2016) suggests head teachers are ideally situated to initiate change. However, not all change needs to come from the top. Alam (2016) reported a project where the teachers in a rural school themselves took responsibility for critically examining and strategically changing their teaching practices. At some level, nevertheless, responsibility needs to be taken.

Reducing fear and shyness

Despite various complexities of relationships my study found that many parents were humble and shy about approaching teachers. They were aware of their own lack of schooling and poverty and felt they might expose themselves to ridicule if they started talking about education. This blocked possibilities of engagement with teachers. My study also suggested that it was teachers who needed to break the barrier of reluctance. Teachers hold the position of respect that can allow them to start communicating with the parents to break down their fear and shyness and so find ways of making them aware of how they can support their children's learning. However, my study also suggests that this can only work if teachers can approach parents in ways that are respectful and sincere, and acknowledge both parents' constraints and their commitment to their children. In the first place communication is just about talking and listening. In time it can create ground to build relationships and then continue to a process of active engagement that would go further than the system of inviting parents to pre-arranged programmes.

Individual and group meetings

In the final group discussion participants suggested different ways of approaching and developing a relationship with individual parents. Some suggested they could start with those parents who are already conscious of the need for study and get them to gradually start talking to their neighbours about the importance of parental support. Others suggested starting with the parents of students who were missing classes or struggling to follow lessons. In either case there was recommendation of small initiatives that could gradually cover all parents.

A specific kind of meeting that was proposed was the yard meeting. Yard meetings have been used in the past by NGOs for vaccination programmes and for adult education. A yard meeting would take place in the open area beside a village and include those from the immediate neighbourhood. This would provide an opportunity to meet people in clusters; teachers could divide up in the area according to where their students live and so cover the school's periphery. After dividing the area, the school could communicate with parents and community leaders and ask them to set a date and organise the meeting and teachers would join the meeting and add their particular agenda. This process would take the school into the community and would allow parents and community to organise the event. It is a

way of affirming parents' importance and responsibilities, and enabling them to bring all their issues into one place and to plan further.

There was also suggestion that since parents and teachers are from same area and meet for various purposes in their daily life, teachers could bring educational issues into the regular conversation.

Another suggestion made was to utilise the times when parents did visit school to negotiate for reducing their children's fees and to argue about promotions to the next class. Teachers could discuss students' progress, make suggestions of how parents could help them, and make a friendly agreement to set up regular communication.

Evolving a model of the process of creating engagement

From the preceding discussion a number of key elements emerge as vital for the process of creating engagement. These are depicted in *Figure 9.3*.

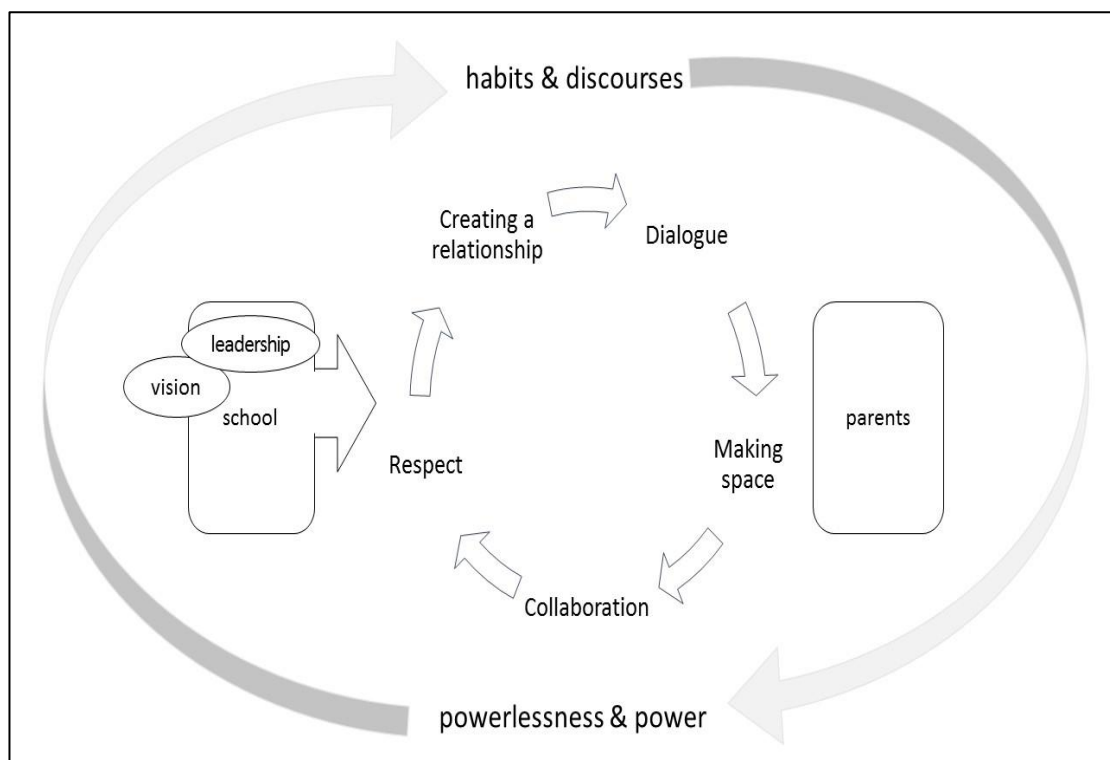


Figure 9.3: Developing engagement

In the rural contexts of Bangladesh, school and community are located amidst the complex patterns of powerlessness and power that have been discussed throughout this thesis. Teachers' roles are popularly constructed as knowledgeable and powerful but they feel a lack of power on the face of class sizes, pressure of examinations and absence of parental

support for students' study. Many parents are disempowered by poverty and their own lack of education, but they hold considerable power over their children's continuance at school and may also find they have the power to support their children's commitment to study.

These patterns are shaped by, and in turn again shape, established habits of thinking and practice and constitute social discourses that not only mould what people say about each other and about themselves but also construct the way they think about themselves and their relationships with others. In these discourses parents are often conceived as indifferent to their children's school and unqualified to help anyway. Teachers are conceived as custodians of knowledge but more interested in extra earning through private tuition and in pleasing local politicians. Current established habits and discourses do not include effective parental engagement in their children's schooling. The development of engagement requires disruption of dominant discourses, breaking of habits and reconceptualisation of power. It requires development of culturally comfortable networks that will augment parents', and teachers' social capital.

This study suggests that it is schools that have to take the initiative in creating possibilities for engagement. To enable them to take such initiative requires strong, even courageous, leadership and a clear vision of how schools, students and parents can benefit from strengthened engagement. This study also suggests five elements that are needed for the development of parental engagement.

The first is Respect or *Sroddha Kora* (শ্রদ্ধা করা). In this study respect was evidenced in Iftekhar going to parents' home instead of only expecting them to come to him, and in his recognition that they cared about their children. It was evidenced in the unassuming way he spoke to parents and in his acceptance of whatever refreshments or hospitality were offered. It was evidenced in his deference to local custom, his use of cultural ways of signalling inclusion, his spending time chatting in tea stalls. Respect is a recognition of the value of the other person and so the basis for a trustful relationship.

The second is Creating a Relationship or *Shomporko Sthapon* (সম্পর্ক স্থাপন). This study showed that although there were already some existing relationships between teachers and parents in the community, the relationships needed to be re-created in order to develop engagement. Iftekhar spent time building and sustaining relationships by his home visits,

by following these up with students' teachers, by chatting in public places, inviting casual visits to school, giving out his mobile number. Once there is a relationship what might have been *talking past each other* can become dialogue; blame giving could change to solution seeking.

The third element is Dialogue or *Motobinimoy* (মতবিনিময়). In this study dialogue between school, parents and community was beginning to develop. Parents were willing to ask for and take advice from Iftekhar. Community members were persuaded to contribute to the costs of connecting the school to electricity. Dialogue was also occurring in my discussion groups after the participants had spent time listening to each other and so creating at least temporary relationship. Both parents and teachers were suggesting the need to find ways to overcome the obstacles to engagement and were critiquing as well as accepting one another's suggestions. Free dialogue can help suggest spaces for engagement that are meaningful to parents as well as teachers.

The fourth element is Making Space or *Anukul Paribesh Toiri* (অনুকূল পরিবেশ তৈরি). As discussed above engagement can develop in a wide range of different ways and can lead to a range of different actions. Space needs to be made for engagement to become active. A space could be a meeting at the school where parents feel free to talk about their concerns as well as listen to the teachers, a chat in the home with teachers' about a child progress, a mother sitting by her daughter as she studies, or a yard meeting where the community sets the agenda. In the earlier stages of this study parents were seen to be struggling to envisage a space for themselves in schools or even in their children's home study, and teachers tended to place the parents as potential listeners to their advice. The scheduled school programmes were seen as spaces for parental engagement by teachers, but were largely rejected by parents. Effective spaces for engagement come out of dialogue within a respectful relationship.

The fifth element is Collaboration or *Shohojogita* (সহযোগিতা). Collaboration can be seen as the fruit of engagement. In my study collaboration through parental engagement was evident in the homes where parents changed aspects of the environment to support children's study and in the support of the community for Iftekhar's school development projects. However there was suggestion of still greater possibilities. There were issues that concerned parents such as cost of additional tuition. There were issues that concerned

teachers such as the student dropout factor because of pressure to work to support the family and early marriage. There were also growing problems that concerned the whole community, such as eve-teasing and addictions. Collaboration between school and parents would not be able to change the realities of rural poverty, but it could find ways to address and at least reduce some of the specific problems within the community. In terms of my study this kind of collaboration was still aspirational. In looking to the future of the role played by parental engagement in rural education in Bangladesh, such collaboration is still to be developed.

Boundaries of this study

I conducted this study to explore the current practices of parental engagement and the perceptions of both teachers and parents. I examined the discourses and underlying social issues that blocked their engagement. In the investigation I identified various social problems that seemed to affirm the need for engagement. These included eve teasing, child marriage, coaching and private tuition. I also reported the example of a head teacher who took strong initiatives for developing parental engagement.

While I present an appreciative account of Iftekhar's activities, I am not suggesting he managed to solve all the community's problems. Poverty continued to exist and so did the other social issues that were identified. In themselves these problems are outside the boundaries of my investigation. I did not ask Iftekhar if his teachers offer private tuition (although I did learn that he had pressed for their commitment to teach the full syllabus within school hours) and I did not ask how successful he was in preventing girls' dropout because of early marriage. At most my study suggests that these are further issues to research.

In addition, this study does not include student's voices. It focuses on parents and teachers and student issues only through the eyes of parents and teachers. Nevertheless students' learning and student well-being is at the heart of parental engagement in schooling. Further research might usefully explore students' perspectives.

Further implications of my study

Although they were outside the scope of my actual research a number of implications arose from the issues directly examined that are interesting for the future of rural schooling and some of them are briefly discussed below.

Relating curriculum to context

It was evident from my study that there is a difference in the cultural capital held by rural parents and that which is valued within schooling. But it is debatable whether that difference has to be so great.

Curriculum in Bangladesh is highly centralised: what students learn in rural areas is the same as in urban areas and is governed by the same examinations. Currently few teachers would apply the curriculum context to their local contexts. However, learning becomes more meaningful if students can relate it directly to the context they live in, and parents could better help their children study if the content in the curriculum was related to their life experiences.

A more flexible approach to content seems needed. If teaching of concepts could be related to the activities of a rural community then parents would be able to draw on their life experiences and on the expertise they have acquired in doing their own jobs and managing their families' needs. Flexibility would allow teachers to bring students' experiences into the classroom and engage parents at home. For example, Bangladesh is an agriculture based country, and knowledge of agriculture is essential in rural people's lives. Parents in the rural context understand agriculture practically from their life experiences, and teachers could utilise their experiences, so allowing them to share in their children's education. In that case parental illiteracy would not be a problem. Such experiences might enable parents to engage in other areas of study as well.

Change would require action by both policy makers and teachers. Policy-makers would need to overtly expand applications of the curriculum to embrace local contexts, and to change the structure of the national examinations. Teachers would need to move beyond lectures based on the textbook and learn how broad curriculum concepts relate to local activities and concerns. A potential side benefit of such a context-based approach to curriculum might be reduction in the use of the commercial guidebooks that currently often supplant the fuller textbook. Comprehensive change may take time; in the short term

rural schools could consider taking at least one topic a year and illustrating it with contextual examples.

Developing innovative leadership

In this study it is a head teacher who initiated the process for change. His work grew out of his own convictions and determination. However, although Iftekhar was working in a confined context, his example suggests the possibility that there are other head teachers in Bangladesh who also take innovative steps to develop parental engagement. Salahuddin (2016) described the organisational initiatives taken by a head teacher in a poor urban area to develop a stronger culture of learning. Alam (2016) indirectly described the creative approach of a head teacher who supported him in his action research project with teachers. A colleague who works in one of the major in-service training institutions in Bangladesh told me about other individual head teachers who are exploring ways to make their school more responsible for student learning. However, there is a lack of published material about such innovations and, to my knowledge; there are no networks to help head teachers develop specifically as innovative leaders of learning rather than as administrators.

As I finish my study I wonder how more innovative head teachers could be encouraged. The appointment of people with vision is one important strategy, but vision may stagnate if it is not encouraged and supported. Just as parents can benefit from sharing with one another and with teachers to gain strength to support their children's learning, so could head teachers. A programme could start at upazila level to share practice among the schools in that area. Then perhaps examples of successful innovation, and learning, from less successful ventures, could be shared at district level, and the perhaps nationally. Policy-makers can then have access to the most ground-breaking as well as successfully implemented ideas from which to build implementation strategies. Equally importantly, head teachers can be inspired and supported in their ventures to develop parental engagement and to improve student learning.

This study suggests that change to improve education can develop from the ground up, from people who understand the communities they are working with and the constraints of context. But the lessons learned from local projects need not remain localised. Innovative head teachers could be brought into training programmes for school leaders, so that other teachers can see what works within the reality of local contexts and be encouraged to

reach out beyond their habitual expectations and perhaps start dreaming about coming to the next training to share their activities. Such a process could offer opportunity to explore previously unexplored leadership practices and also be a recognition of innovators' activities.

Empowering SMC and PTA

There are currently parents involved in the SMCs and PTAs who are from low socio-economic backgrounds, as noted briefly earlier. Currently it often appears that their involvement is not serving the needs of their community groups. It was argued that they are not well informed and not aware of their responsibilities, and so they play nominal roles in committees that could support parental engagement in schooling. It is important for policy-makers to not only set new agendas for these committees and develop new regulations about their operations but also to provide training for members. Members need facilitative support to be able to critically examine and debate their responsibilities and the purpose of their involvement in SMC and PTA. Stronger understanding of their roles would not only empower them to contribute their part as a member of the committee but also would develop their leadership skills. They could then more knowledgeably and more strategically take part in school decision making processes.

Recommendations

The findings of this research suggest a number of recommendations for policy, teacher training, and research.

For policy

There is common existing policy for parental engagement in the secondary schools throughout the country that does not overtly acknowledge the urban rural divide. It asks schools to take the initial steps to engage parents, but there is lack of direction for implementation.

Therefore, from this study it is recommended that:

- Comprehensive training is provided at local level to SMC and PTA members
- Head teachers are provided training in relationship building with parents

- Schools are encouraged to investigate their communities and their problems and make their own plans to encourage parental engagement
- Workshops are held in local communities to enable parents and teachers to sit together and discuss education in their community

For teacher training

This study showed that teachers are taking initiatives to bring parents into the school and that they do want their help in following up classroom teaching. It also showed that in many cases they do not fully consider the barriers blocking engagement. Nor are they considering engagement as a means to address parents' concerns.

Therefore, from this study it is recommended that pre-service and in-service training includes:

- Exploration of the role of parents in education
- Relationship-building
- Emphasis on context and community
- Exercises in making curriculum relevant to specific contexts
- Practice in making home-visits

For research

While there is a rich body of international research about parental engagement, there is very little research based in Bangladesh. In the research that exists parental engagement is often a side issue to other schooling concerns and is mostly discussed in terms of survey results. There is little about rural contexts or about effective practices. There is need for far more investigation.

Therefore, from this study it is recommended that future research include:

- Detailed case studies of effective parental engagement in rural and in urban settings.
- Studies of the impact of parental engagement on rural student retention
- Action research studies of head teachers' learning circles
- Action research studies of the impact of parent-teacher-community collaboration on incidents of eve-teasing and other social problems

A brief reflection on my own learning

Although the focus of my research was on my participants' perceptions and actions, I realise that my perceptions and understandings have changed during this project. I have developed as a researcher and I have also developed in my understanding of what parental engagement can mean.

As a researcher whose initial academic training was in Bangladesh, I have learned new ways of investigating educational issues. Qualitative research is still a very new field in Bangladesh and is not yet well understood. I have learned to spend time with participants and to actively seek to both reflect their voices and the contextual circumstances which underlie what they say. I have also begun to understand that answers to important questions often can only be answered partially, in terms of their context and the participants involved. I have begun to appreciate the usefulness of partial and contextual answers.

At the end of Chapter Seven I reported suggestions for improving communication made by the group of parents and teachers with whom I had been working. I found that the process of talking with one another and listening to one another in my project had allowed them to move from their initial positions of justifying their own actions and laying blame on the other party to collaboratively exploring ways of doing things differently. Similarly, I realise that my understandings of the actions of schools and parents changed through the study. I chose the topic because of my earlier work as a field officer and I had seen how little parental engagement there was in the region where I worked. I entered the field thinking I understood some of the issues. The understandings I had then matched, to some extent, the statements that I report in Chapter Five and that I call the *discourses* of engagement. As I stayed in the field and talked more with local people and participated in their daily lives I gradually learned that the situation was much more complex. When I was given the opportunity to travel around with Iftekhar on his motorcycle and to talk with him about his vision and his strategies my understandings changed again, and I began to appreciate that, while there were real and very complex problems that lead to *dis-engagement*, those problems did not be absolute blocks - there were ways through.

Although I have developed a conceptual model of how engagement can be created I am very aware that each of the five elements I identified will take different forms in different

contexts. However, my model suggested key points which could be applicable in a wider context. These are:

- schools have potential, and therefore responsibility, to take the initiative
- respect is the necessary foundation for building relationships
- engagement will come through dialogue not through one-sided expectations
- space needs to be created where people feel comfortable to participate
- only then is collaboration possible

I am also aware that I have opened up many new questions at the same time as I have offered contextual answers to the research questions I set. Some of these I hope to answer in future research. Others I hope will provoke other researchers.

At the end of my journey I revisit my study and ask myself what new knowledge this study contributes. I believe it offers:

- a detailed contextual example of initiative to engage rural parents in schooling
- alternatives to dominant current practices of inviting parents
- tentative theorisation of means to engage parents in rural Bangladesh contexts
- a detailed presentation of what parents and teachers in rural areas of Bangladesh are saying about engagement in schooling and doing
- an examination of the social and historic forces that cause current disengagement
- willingness by parents and teachers to bridge the gap indicates that communication, collaboration and engagement are possible in rural contexts

Final comment

The government of Bangladesh is taking a range of initiatives to improve education and to make all the new generation fully literate and able to contribute to their communities. There is still some way to go to achieve the target. Currently many children, especially those in rural areas, are still not receiving the planned benefits of education. Not all problems can be solved by active parental engagement in education. However, some can be better examined, challenged and perhaps incrementally resolved if parents are active participants in their children's learning.

One of the challenges for Bangladesh is to find better ways of engaging parents from all groups in society in their children's education. Iftekhar's project offers one example of

how such engagement can be encouraged and supported. It is valuable because it is an example from Bangladesh itself and so it relates to Bangladeshi contexts. However, each school and each community needs to find its own ways to develop communication, relationships and collaboration. The challenge of what needs to be done is echoed by a Bangladeshi song:

দ্বিধা সংশয় মুছে করো অসম্ভব কে সম্ভব

বুকে সাহস রেখে বন্ধু আগাও, অবাক বাংলাকে

দেখিয়ে দাও

তুমি পারো তুমি পারো, বাঁধার দেয়াল তুমি ভাঙতে

পারো!

Let go of hesitation and uncertainty and
make what seemed impossible possible.

Go forward with courage, and surprise our
Bangla people, showing that it can be done:
those high walled barriers can be broken
down!

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Appendix One

Ethics Approval



HUMAN ETHICS COMMITTEE

Secretary, Lynda Griffioen

Email: human-ethics@canterbury.ac.nz

Ref: 2014/62/ERHEC

17 December 2014

Mahammad Hasnat
School of Teacher Education
UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY

Dear Mahammad

Thank you for providing the revised documents in support of your application to the Educational Research Human Ethics Committee. I am very pleased to inform you that your research proposal "A case study on stakeholder's engagement in rural secondary schools in Bangladesh" has been granted ethical approval.

Please note that this approval is subject to the following:

- The incorporation of the amendments you have provided in your email of 15 December 2014.
- Please ensure the consent procedures are consistent in the information sheets and consent forms.

Should circumstances relevant to this current application change you are required to reapply for ethical approval.

If you have any questions regarding this approval, please let me know.

We wish you well for your research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nicola Surtees'.

Nicola Surtees
Chair
Educational Research Human Ethics Committee

"Please note that Ethical Approval and/or Clearance relates only to the ethical elements of the relationship between the researcher, research participants and other stakeholders. The granting of approval or clearance by the Ethical Clearance Committee should not be interpreted as comment on the methodology, legality, value or any other matters relating to this research."

F E S